# VOICES OF MY ELDERS: FORGOTTEN PLACE, INVISIBLE PEOPLE

## A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS LIVING IN THE RURAL SOUTHERN BLACK BELT DURING THE JIM CROW ERA

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# DEDICATION

To my brother Timothy Washington - October, 1969 – April 2014. Forever in my heart. I love and miss you dearly.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First, let me express sincere gratitude to my elders who agreed to participate in this research study. I am honored that you all allowed me to come into your homes and lives to share your life stories. Secondly, I would like to thank my committee members. Thank you Dr. Jim Scheurich for your endless encouragement and support. Thank you Dr. Eckes, Dr. Medina, and Dr. Thompson for serving on my dissertation committee. In addition, thank you to the University Graduate School for offering me a President's Diversity Dissertation Fellowship. My gratitude extends out to the professional colleagues and friends who traveled this journey with me. I would also like to express devout gratitude to my family.

Hey siblings, Bridgett, Burna, Grace, Gertha, Enoch, Emmett, Denise, and DeWayne, thank you for your support and for believing in me. I did it! Love you all very much.

The gratitude that I have for my parents, Enoch D and Pearlie M Washington, cannot adequately be explained in words on a page. Your unconditional love and support, coupled with your endless and unconditional faith has been my guide in life. During this emotional journey, you carried me when I had lost the strength to continue my journey. Thank you for believing in me and for encouraging me to just keep moving. I love you mom and dad with every fiber of my being. WE DID IT!

DiAnna Washington

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS LIVING IN

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The systemic racism imposed on the lives and education aspiration of six of my elders who stayed in the racist South during the ferociously deleterious era of Jim Crow is the focus of this phenomenological critical race study. These stories centered the voices of my elders as powerful weapons to expose white supremacy and the psychophysiological trauma imposed upon my elders. These stories were about the lives, lived experiences, and educational trials and triumphs of six of my Brown and Black hue American elders whose ancestry was born out of slavery and delivered into the vicious Jim Crow era.

My work was grounded in Phenomenological Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory validates my elders' narratives and their narratives fortify the tenets of CRT. For you see, racism was an everyday phenomenon my elders experienced as residents of rural Southern America. My elders came to understand "what" they were, Black, by understanding "who" they were not, White. Furthermore, this qualitative phenomenological critical race study was guided by three inquiries, what experiences have you had with Jim Crow; how or in what ways did your experiences with Jim Crow affect your education; and how or in what ways did your experience with Jim Crow affect your life? These inquiries produced four intersecting themes, 1) the survival of racism as part of everyday life, 2) economic exploitation of Black labor, 3) denial of equitable

education, and 4) the sociopolitical construction of racial identity, and three significant findings, racist place, sociopolitical oppression, and inequitable education.

Jim Scheurich, Ph.D., Chair

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

African Americans fighting for their right to an education is historically linked to atrocious acts of racism and systemic inequalities (Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1995). A critical evaluation of this historical journey of denied educational opportunities of African Americans in the rural Southern Black Belt reveals a well-crafted deceptive operation to repress and racially script education to sustain a deficit narrative regarding African Americans' intellectual abilities and educational determination (Anderson, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Bullock, 1967; Dollard, 1988; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963; Horsford, 2011; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wilder, 2014). This historical representation of denied education of African Americans is prolific and well documented (Alexander, 2012; Anderson, 1988; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2014; Bullock, 1967; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Dollard, 1988; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Goldfield, 1991; Hansan, 2011; Harrington, 1963; Horsford, 2011; Molina, 2014; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilder, 2014).

This system of denied education of African Americans is intimately connected to the enslavement of Africans (Alexander, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2014; Wilder, 2014), the genocide of Indigenous nations (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Wilder, 2014), and the denied citizenship of Mexicans and other immigrant groups (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Molina, 2014; Wilder, 2014). This study, thus, acknowledges the inequitable education opportunities imposed on other racialized and marginalized groups; however, the denied education opportunity of Black people residing in the rural Southern Black Belt serves as the focus of this study.

Enslaved Africans were legally barred from learning to read or write (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Mitchell, 2008; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). Such legal regulations came in the form of slave codes (Grant, 2015; Ingersoll, 1995; Haney-Lopez, 1994; Mitchell, 2008; Rugemer, 2013; Turner, Giacopassi, & Vandiver, 2006). Slave codes were established to maintain an oppressive system of inequitable education (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Haney-Lopez, 1994; Mitchell, 2008; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). These slave codes also demanded punishment of any individual who sought to teach enslaved Africans how to read or write (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Mitchell, 2008; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). For example, white men and women were fined or imprisoned if they were caught teaching enslaved Africans how to read or write. Although some whites sacrificed their livelihoods to teach Black people how to read and write, this study focuses on the strength and heroic efforts of Black people to dismantle the inequitable and racist white conception of education. Conjointly, freed, and enslaved Black people who were caught teaching enslaved Africans to read or write received physical punishment (e.g., whippings) (Cornelius, 1983; Gundaker, 2007).

Nevertheless, even amid such harsh punishment, there existed courageous Black educators. These pre and post-Civil War Black educators, Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback (1837 - 1921), Kate Drumgoold (1858/59 – year of death unknown), Lucy C. Laney (1854 - 1933), William Sanders Scarborough (1852 – 1926), Mary Church Terrell (1863 – 1954), Frederick Douglass (1818 – 1895), and Susie King Taylor (1848 – 1912), to name a few, were successful at securing their education (Anderson, 1988; Douglas, & Garrison, 1849; Douglass & Logan, 2003; Drumgoold, 1898; Laney, 1899 (as cited in McCluskey, 2014); Mohr, 1974; Neverdon-Morton, 1982; Scarborough, 2005; Taylor,

1902; Terrell, 1904, 1940; Watson, 1999). These Black educators became crusaders for education reform that provided education emancipation for all enslaved Black people. Correspondingly, Black schools dating pre-Civil Rights were established by efforts of enslaved and freed Black people to support their emancipation and ultimately to control their lives (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). However, just as enslaved and freed Black people held an ideology of education, so did White planters and slave owners.

White planters and slave owners controlled the political, economic, and social contexts of the rural South (Goldfield, 1991; Dollard, 1988; Harrington, 1963). These white planters and slave owners attempted to halt the advancement of Black education by imposing coercive labor, restrictive mobility, and reduced wages (Anderson, 1988). They fought to convince both enslaved and freed Black people that their white conception of education was the natural order of things. Additionally, these white planters and slave owners were not in favor of education for enslaved and or freed Black people. They feared that if Black people learned how to read and write, they would rebel (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Spring, 2016). Consequently, a system of second-class education for Black people was created. This system of second-class education for Black people was a socioeconomic ideology created and sustained by political and economic forces of subordination (Anderson, 1988; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Bullock, 1967; Dollard, 1988; Mitchell, 2008; Shujaa, 1996). Notwithstanding, Black people resisted this white ideology of education as the natural order of education that excluded them. Appropriately, enslaved and freed Black people fought to pursue their course of education (Anderson, 1988; Horsford, 2011; Mitchell, 2008; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005;

Wright, 1941). This quest to create and sustain a system of equitable education for Black people by Black people was no easy task.

Historically, the creation of Black schools was a tumultuous journey requiring relentless determination to combat and dismantle the detrimental outcomes and impact of education's legal segregation arbitration (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Horsford, 2011; Mitchell, 2008; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Shujaa, 1996; Wilder, 2014). "Ebony and Ivory" (McCartney, 1982) might go together in perfect harmony on Stevie Wonder's keyboard, but every fiber of *Ebony and Ivy* (Wilder, 2014) go together in perfect dissonance. This statement is supported by reflecting on how the lives and educational journeys of African Americans residing in the rural Southern Black Belt were controlled by racial regimes enforced by Supreme Court rulings (Davis, 1989; *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 1857; *Jane Doe v. State of Louisiana*, 1985; Haney-Lopez, 1994; *Loving v. Virginia*, 1967; Molina, 2014; *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005).

## Supreme Court Rulings

For instance, the Supreme Court case *Dred Scott v Sandford* (1857), denied full birthright privileges to free Black people born in the United States. Additionally, *Jane Doe v the State of Louisiana* 1985 reinforced racist ideology by upholding the "one-drop" rule that determined an individual's socially constructed racial identity. The one-drop rule was a legal principal created in the United States during the 19th century to establish racial classification (Hollinger, 2005; Khanna, 2010; Saperstein & Penner, 2012; Saperstein, Penner, & Light, 2013). Furthermore, separate but equal legal regulations were established with the infamous Supreme Court case, *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896). In

this Supreme Court case, the Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment extended equality only as far as political and civil rights, not social rights.

Additionally, the rulings of Supreme Court cases *Watson v City of Memphis,* (1963), and *Palmer v Thompson* (1971) upheld racial segregation by maintaining the doctrine of separate but equal. The precedent set forth by *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) established the "separate but equal" legal doctrine that affirmed separate facilities for the races was constitutional as long as the facilities were "substantially equal." These separate facilities included all public accommodations such as churches, restaurants, medical clinics and hospitals, courthouses, transportation, toilets, public water fountains, and more importantly, to this study, education. Hence, what influence did the Supreme Court impose upon establishing equitable education for Blacks?

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was the consolidation of four cases from separate states were African American minors had been denied admittance to public schools. The argument was that such segregation violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Based on the precedent, separate but equal, set by *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896), the plaintiffs' argument was denied. However, in a case arising from Delaware, the Supreme Court ruled that the African American students be admitted to the white public schools because the white public schools were higher quality facilities (*Brown v. Board of Education,* 1954). However, the Supreme Court case *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), a freedom of choice desegregation plan, placed the onus of integration on African American students, thus, did not eradicate segregated schools. The saga did not end with these Supreme Court cases. As stated previously, Black people fighting for equitable educational opportunities has been an

arduous journey, a journey that continues to plague the education aspirations of Black people.

By way of illustration, the Supreme Court ruled in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) against compulsory metropolitan desegregation unless it could be proven that suburban districts behaved with deliberate segregative intent. Wait for it. Another Supreme Court case negated Brown's decision for equal opportunity to learn, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriquez* (1973). The court declared it was constitutionally permissible for enormous disparities in funding to continue to exist between rich and poor school districts throughout the county. Furthermore, the Supreme Court cases *Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell* (1991), *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992), and *Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995) enforced dismissing desegregation orders allowing for a return to neighborhood schools even if doing so meant returning to segregated schools (Horsford, 2011; Orfield, Frankenberg & Lee, 2003).

These battles for educational inequalities lasted for years and are still being fought today; even though, as stated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations Human Rights, 1948) and Article 13 of International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (United Nations Human Rights, 1966), all humans have been granted access to free education at both the secondary level and appropriate education at the post-secondary level. However, the interpretation and implementation of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Article 13 of International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966) have been altered, redefined, and construed by a white ideology of education that sustain systemic inequalities, white supremacy, and subjugation of Black people (Churchill, 2016; Wilder,

2014). It could be argued that these aforementioned historical Supreme Court cases allow for present-day education disparities.

These disparities include a decrease in the number of highly effective teachers in high poverty and resource deprived school districts, staffing teacher vacancies with less experienced teachers in high poverty and disadvantaged schools (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Presley, White, & Gong, 2005; Quay, 2011; Sunderman & Kim, 2005); and a lack of essential education resources (Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010).

## Jim Crow in Action

These findings raise important questions regarding the historical, educational journeys and lived experiences of African Americans living in the Black Belt of rural Southern America during the Jim Crow era. Jim Crow was the name given to de jure segregation, legal segregation, which operated mostly, but not exclusively, in the Southern states reportedly during the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s (Kennedy, 2011; Pilgrim, 2000; Woodward, 1966). Simplistically, Jim Crow was a series of anti-Black social etiquette norms (Figure 1.1), rules (Figure 1.2), and state laws (Figure 1.3) that positioned African Americans as second-class citizens.

*Figure 1.1:* Jim Crow Etiquette Norms

| | |
|---|---|
| Greetings<br>Introductions | A black male could not offer his hand (to shake hands) with a white male because it implied being socially equal. Obviously, a black male could not offer his hand or any other part of his body to a white woman, because he risked being accused of rape.<br><br>Whites did not use courtesy titles of respect when referring to blacks, for example, Mr., Mrs., Miss., Sir, or Ma'am. Instead, Blacks were called by their first names. Blacks had to use courtesy titles when referring to whites, and Blacks were not allowed to call whites by their first names.<br><br>Jim Crow etiquette prescribed that Blacks were introduced to whites, never whites to blacks. For example: "Mr. Peters (the white person), this is Charlie (the black person), that I spoke to you about." |
| Dining | Blacks and whites were not supposed to eat together. If they did eat together, whites were to be served first, and some sort of partition was to be placed between them. |
| Driving<br>Transportation | White motorists had the right-of-way at all intersections.<br><br>If a black person rode in a car driven by a white person, the black person sat in the back seat, or the back of a truck. |
| Public interaction<br>Courtesy | Under no circumstance was a black male to offer to light the cigarette of a white female — that gesture implied intimacy.<br><br>Blacks were not allowed to show public affection toward one another in public, especially kissing, because it offended whites. |

*Figure 1.2:* Jim Crow Communal Rules for Black People

Never assert that a white person is lying.

Never impute dishonorable intentions to a white person.

Never suggest that a white person is from an inferior class.

Never lay claim to, or overly demonstrate, superior knowledge or intelligence.

Never curse a white person.

Never laugh derisively at a white person.

Never comment upon the appearance of a white female.

*Figure 1.3*: Jim Crow State Laws

| State | Law (s) |
|---|---|
| Georgia law | Amateur Baseball: "It shall be unlawful for any amateur white baseball team to play baseball on any vacant lot or baseball diamond within two blocks of a playground devoted to the Negro race, and it shall be unlawful for any amateur colored baseball team to play baseball in any vacant lot or baseball diamond within two blocks of any playground devoted to the white race."<br>Barbering: "No colored person shall serve as a barber [to] white women or girls."<br>Beer and Wine Sales: "All persons licensed to conduct the business of selling beer or wine...shall serve either white people exclusively or colored people exclusively and shall not sell to two races within the same room at any time."<br>Burial: "The officer in charge shall not bury, or allow to be buried, any colored persons upon ground set apart or used for the burial of white persons."<br>Hospitalization: "The Board of Control shall see that proper and distinct apartments are arranged for said patients [in a mental hospital], so that in no cases shall Negroes and white persons be together." |
| Alabama | Buses: "All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and colored races."<br>Nursing: "No person or corporation shall require any White female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed."<br>Restaurants: "It shall be unlawful to conduct a restaurant or other place for the serving of food in the city, at which white and colored people are served in the same room, unless such white and colored persons are effectually separated by a solid partition extending from the floor upward to a distance of seven feet or higher, and unless a separate entrance from the street is provided for each compartment."<br>Toilets: "Every employer of white or negro males shall provide for such white or negro males reasonably accessible and separate toilet facilities." |
| North Carolina | Libraries: "The state librarian is directed to fit up and maintain a separate place for the use of the colored people who may come to the library for the purpose of reading books or periodicals." |

| | |
|---|---|
| Florida | Marriage: "All marriages between a white person and a negro, or between a white person and a person of negro descent to the fourth generation inclusive, are hereby forever prohibited." |
| Wyoming | Marriage: "All marriages of white persons with Negroes, Mulattos, Mongolians, or Malaya hereafter contracted in the State of Wyoming are and shall be illegal and void." |
| Mississippi | Prison: "The warden shall see that the white convicts shall have separate apartments for both eating and sleeping from the negro convicts." |
| New Mexico | Schools: "Separate rooms [shall] be provided for the teaching of pupils of African descent, and [when] said rooms are provided, such pupils may not be admitted to the school rooms occupied and used by pupils of Caucasian or other descent." |
| Texas | Schools: "[The County Board of Education] shall provide schools of two kinds; those for white children and those for colored children." |
| Oklahoma | Teaching: "Any instructor who shall teach in any school, college or institution where members of the white and colored races are received and enrolled as pupils for instruction shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof, shall be fined..." |

These racist Jim Crow etiquette norms, rules, and state laws governed so-called acceptable social interactions between Black people and white people. Moreover, these white supremacist regulations were designed to relegate Black people to an inferior status (Kennedy, 2011; Pilgrim, 2000; Woodward, 1966). In response, the purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen 2016), critical race study is to explore the lived experiences and educational journeys of African Americans who lived through the Jim Crow era, as residents of a small rural Southern community located in the Black Belt's Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas.

## The Black Belt

The Black Belt, as defined by Wimberley (2010), comprises "disproportionately rural counties sweeping from eastern Virginia southwest to northern Florida and then

west to the Mississippi Delta and eastern Texas" (p. 103; see also Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris, 2000) where the population of Black people is usually higher than the national average (Fitzsimmons, 1956; Library of Congress, 1860, United State Census Office & Gannett, 1898; Wimberley, 2008). Figures 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6 illustrate the concentration of Black people in the Southern United States across time.

*Figure 1.4:* Slave Population - Southern United States 1860

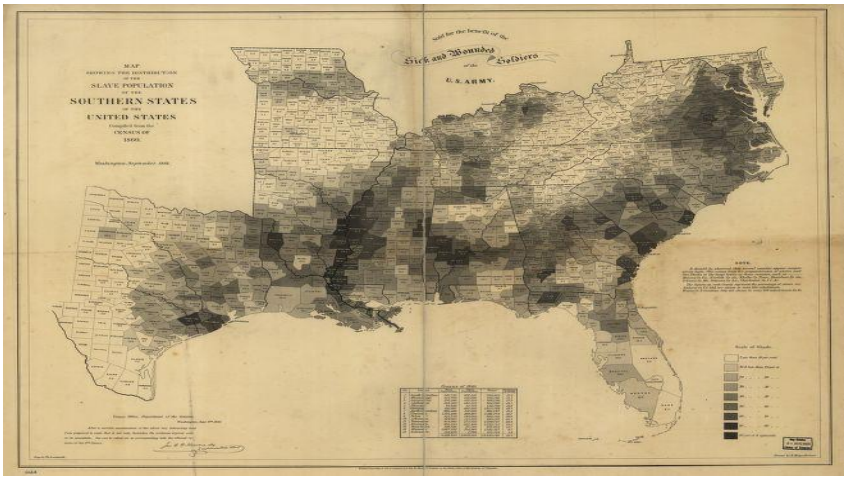
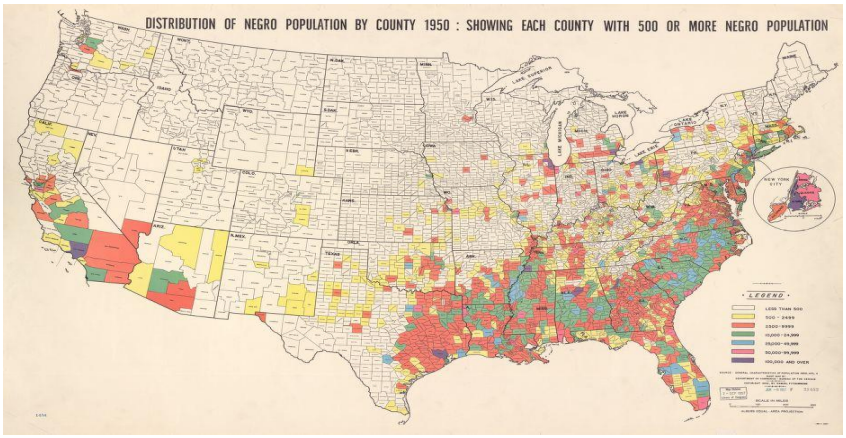



*Figure 1.5:* Library of Congress - Population of "Colored" in the U.S. Black Belt in 1890

*Figure 1.6:* Population of "Negros" in the U. S. Black Belt in 1950




## Research Inquiry

By examining the educational journeys of African Americans who survived the Jim Crow era while residing in the rural Southern Black Belt, we learn about the destructive and oppressive invasiveness of systemic racism on the existence, the humanity, and the educational achievements of Black people. Thus, this qualitative phenomenological critical race exploratory study is guided by the following inquiries:

What experiences have you had with Jim Crow, legal segregation, as an African American residing in Brinkley, Arkansas - the rural Southern Black Belt?

How or in what ways did your experiences with Jim Crow affect your education?

How or in what ways did your experience with Jim Crow affect your life?

Because Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides the critical analysis of society and culture regarding the intersections of race, power, and law (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993), it is the theoretical framework guiding this study. CRT posits that race and racism are always prevalent in everyday life in the United States, influence all social interactions, and dominate the research process. In response, CRT disrupts the dominant narrative of white supremacy

and racism (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Additionally, this study will employ phenomenological research methods (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2016) to capture the essence of the lived experiences of African Americans in the Black Belt.

Phenomenological research is a form of qualitative research that explores a phenomenon of interest that holds familiar meaning for an identified population (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2016). Because phenomenological research aims to highlight what an experience means to individuals through the exploration of narratives and perceptions, it is an excellent companion to the tenets of CRT (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These critical tenets include the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, "challenging dominant white ideology"; "a commitment to social justice"; "the centrality of experiential knowledge"; and "the transdisciplinary perspective" (Solorano &Yosso, 2002, pp. 3-5). As a result, CRT provides a space to explore the lived experiences of my African American elders who survived the Jim Crow era, while residing in the rural Southern Black Belt.

Moreover, CRT views the oppressive educational experiences and journeys of racialized and marginalized individuals as sources of knowledge and strength that challenge colonialized research (Collins, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Therefore, it is the fourth tenet of CRT, the centrality of experiential knowledge, (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), that will guide this study. The methods of the centrality of experiential knowledge focus on the "storytelling," "family histories," "biographies," "scenarios," and

"narratives" of people of color regarding their lived experiences with oppression (Solorano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27; see, also, Collins, 2009). The narratives of my elders will serve as this centrality. Hence, this study takes place in my hometown of Brinkley, Arkansas.

I consider Brinkley, Arkansas, my hometown because I was born and reared there, and my parents still reside in Brinkley. Brinkley, Arkansas is a small rural Southern community within the Black Belt's Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas. Consequently, as who I am now, a multiethnic heterosexual African American woman, graduate student, and an education researcher have been influenced and shaped by this community in which I was raised. I approach my research keenly aware that my identity will have an impact on my research.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter laid the foundation for my dissertation study. This dissertation study was driven by my connection to the community, and my concerns about the forgotten place and the invisible people who reside in Brinkley. My work was grounded in Phenomenological Critical Race Theory. Therefore, to explore the lived experiences and educational journeys of African Americans who lived through the Jim Crow era as residents of Brinkley, Arkansas, I interviewed six community members, whom I refer to as my elders. To conduct this study, I spent 12 months conducting interviews and writing reflective notes.

Furthermore, chapter one described the historical legacy of political, legal, and social contexts of the Jim Crow era. In addition, chapter one provided an explanation and descriptions of the research setting, a small rural community located in the Southern

Black Belt. Chapter Two will highlight the literature that informed this dissertation study. The literature review focused on four critical aspects of forgotten place, invisible people, whiteness ideology, and Black education.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical landscape of the South meant Black lives were controlled by Jim Crow and legal precedents established by Supreme Court rulings. Under Jim Crow rule, Black people were condemned to an imposed positionality of inferior status in comparison to White citizens. For example, Black people were legally mandated to use separate facilities including, but not limited to water fountains, restrooms, restaurants, schools, and churches; not allowed to socialized with or marry white people; and were denied citizenship (Black, 1960; Davis, 1989; Dred Scott v. Sandford, 1857; Hansan, 2011; Hoelscher, 2003; Jane Doe v Louisiana, 1985; Loving v Virginia, 1967; Moline, 2014; Plessy v Ferguson, 1896; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005).

Although researchers have investigated the lives and lived experiences of rural Black people during the late 1880s and early 1990s (Anderson, 1988; Beaulieu, 1988; Dollard, 1988; Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer, 2015; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963; Iceland, 2013; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wilkerson, 2010; Wright, 1941), limited research has been conducted to study the impact of the phenomenon, Jim Crow, on the lives and educational attainment of elderly African American who did not migrate during the years of the great migration (Wilkerson, 2010), but choose to remain in the rural Southern Black Belt of the United States (Anderson, 1988; Anderson, 2017; Bullock, 1967; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wilkerson, 2010).

The limited research regarding the lives of Black people who resided in the rural South during the Jim Crow era is surprising for three reasons. First, the Black population was a rural population historically located in the Southern regions of the United States (Beaulieu, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Falk, Talley, & Rankin, 1993; Goldfield,

1991; Lichter, 1989; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Shapley, 2015; Wilkerson, 2010; Wimberley, 2008). Second, post-bellum poverty rates for rural Southern Black people represented the poorest regions in American society (Beaulieu, 1988; Durant & Knowlton, 1978; Harrington, 1963; Lichter, 1989; Rogers & Weiher, 1986). Third, the intersectionality of place, race, and education has been, can be, and is a deadly collision for Black people (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wilkerson, 2010). The access to educational opportunities is highly correlated to geographical location and a multiplicity of identity markers (e.g. race, gender, socioeconomic status) (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hutchinson, 2004, Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Lichter (1989) contributed to the lack of rural research on the notion that rural Black people were more spatially dispersed, thus less visible, and easier to ignore (p. 436). Furthermore, Dudenhefer (1993) indicated that the lack of rural research regarding the lived experiences of Black people and rural poverty is overshadowed by a fixation on urban issues and crises. These findings raise important questions regarding the experiences of Black people living in rural America. Therefore, the rural Southern Black Belt region is the focus of this exploration.

According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), the narratives of Blacks, a historically minoritized and oppressed group, is essential to confronting and deconstructing systemic racism and inequalities. Thus, this study seeks to explore the oral histories of elderly African Americans who survived the Jim Crow era while residing in the small rural community of Brinkley, Arkansas, which is located in Monroe County, a

Delta region of Arkansas. This review is divided into four sections, forgotten place, invisible people, repressed education, and Arkansas Public Education. The term rural is explored and defined in the first section of this review. The second section provides a brief overview of race in America. Race in America will be explored via the lens of whiteness ideology and the imposed positionality of the invisible people, Black people, who populated the rural Southern Black Belt. This imposed positionality will include a review of the intersectionality of employment and poverty. The third section explores the legal terrain of repressed education for Black people and the racist historical ideologies that scripted education for Blacks, including interest convergence, legalized education segregation, privatization, globalization, and neoliberal rhetoric. This section also includes an exploration of the resiliency of enslaved and freed Black people to create schools. This chapter closes with an overview of the legal battles and sanctions that repressed educational opportunities for Black students in Arkansas.

## Forgotten Place

### Rural Explored and Defined

"Places are centers of value. They attract or repel in finely shaded degrees. To attend to them even momentarily is to acknowledge their reality and value" (Tuan, 1977, pp. 17-18, as cited in Hutchinson, 2004). Places hold meaning for individuals. The thought of a place conjures up images of social settings and interactions, experiences, historical events, and emotions (Hutchison, 2004). Thus, place can be situated as an individual, societal, political, and or economic constructed reality. Meaning, place is a reality informed and constructed by historical events, a community of people, and unique

individual experiences. Ultimately, place is not contained in absolute truth, but rather encompasses the vast diversity of endless boundaries of individuality and experiences.

Norberg-Schulz (1980, as cited in Hutchinson, 2004), defined place as "space plus character" (p. 18). In other words, place is not designed; it is created. This creation of place can be uplifting to some individuals and condemning to others. Hutchinson (2004) expands on Norberg-Schulz's definition of place by explaining the sociology of place. He comments that place is not "value-free" or "apolitical," but that places are cultural sites of "social inequities and patterns of domination" (p. 14). Places give shape to our experiences and images of people, communities, events, and time. For example, the term rural America may invoke images of simplistic lifestyles and picturesque landscapes sometimes without consideration of the vast diversity of people who reside in the rather complex, yet conspicuous systemic inequalities of rural America. Some individuals romanticize rural Southern living using vivid images to describe the life and place of the rural South, such as open spaces, beautiful landscapes, wild animals roaming free and grazing, large farms, beautiful crops, and a slow, peaceful pace to life (Falk et al., 1993; Johnson, 2006, 2013). Other individuals deglamorize the rural South by describing rural communities as backward, isolated, desolate, and depressing (Dollard, 1988; Lichter & Brown, 2011; Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino, 2012; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). Thus, descriptions of rural communities are sociopolitical constructs used to create place.

Another example of creating place can be seen when advertising agencies use conning methods of distorted mirrors, "Zerrspiegel" (Marchand, 1985, p. xvii), to beguile people with images of what is considered an idyllic American life. Poetic descriptions and beautifully displayed pictures of happy families with nicely manicured lawns, shiny

new automobiles in their driveways, friendly neighbors waving hello, and little blue-eyed and blond hair children peacefully playing are offered as incentives to anyone convinced to buy this socially constructed American life. Well, it is essential to point out that these socially constructed depictions were not representational reflections of the lives of Black people who during pre-Civil War and the Jim Crow era, had no civil rights, were denied education, and were controlled by de jure segregation (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hansan, 2011; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilder, 2014).

Although rural regions might encompass beautiful landscapes, rolling hills, and communion with nature, rural regions have a long history of enslavement, systemic racism, political domination, economic oppression, white supremacy, and discriminatory statutes (Anderson, 1988; Beaulieu, 1988; Dollard, 1988; Falk et a., 1993; Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer, 2015; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963; Iceland, 2013; Lichter & Brown, 2011; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wilkerson, 2010; Wright, 1941). The rural South's past practices and statutory laws of dehumanizing Black people and oppressive historical, political, social, and economic contexts have sustained the regions current conditions of economic decline, political corruption, social isolation, and an imposed positionality of inferior status of Black people (Dollard, 1988; Falk et al., 1993; Flora et al., 2015; Harrington, 1963; Iceland, 2013; Johnson, 2006, 2013). This complexity of rural America is compounded by globalization, demographic changes, political shifts, and declining infrastructure (Johnson, 2006, 2013).

According to Johnson (2006), rural population fluctuations are susceptible to socioeconomic factors, political structures, and population migration. These changes are

not uniformed across rural regions. While some rural regions experience growth in population, increased economic profitability, and improved infrastructure, other regions are stagnant or continuously declining. Noteworthy, the current makeup of rural America is vastly different from rural communities of the past. Instead of using horses and oxen to plow fields, combine harvesters and crop dusters efficiently harvest crops. Instead of children playing kick-the-bottle top or jumping rope, children play electronic games or spend the day watching television (Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). In addition, the millions of people living in rural communities who were once disconnected from mainstream economic growth are now more connected to urban life via technology, vacation opportunities, advancements in public transportation, and family and social networks (Lichter & Brown, 2011). Nevertheless, this statement is not valid for all regions of rural American. Given these complexities, it is no wonder why it is difficult to identify and define rural places.

There is no concise delineation of what is considered rural communities or spaces. Generally, rural communities are defined by "land-use, or economic concepts, exhibiting considerable variation in socioeconomic characteristics and well-being of the measured population" (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2012, p. 30; see also, Johnson, 2013; Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016). Likewise, the United States Department of Agriculture defined rural in terms of its use to meet research and or economic development program goals. Moreover, the Census Bureau modified the definition of rural spaces based on population density as the unit of analysis (Johnson, 2013). For example, the 1920 census and the 1949 rural housing program defined rural as any space with fewer than 2,500 people. However, the current population threshold used to define rural ranges from 10,000 to

50,000 people and was determined by definition used to describe rural spaces (Cromartie, 2017).

Better still, Flora, Flora, and Gasteyer (2015) suggested defining rural according to organizational purposes. For example, the government uses labels to determine which places are granted governmental assistance in the form of social services and programs. Similarly, scholars use labels for qualitative and quantitative research purposes, but will often rely on governmental labels of places and spaces for data collection. As previously mentioned, the media make use of labels to depict and induce specific images for advertising purposes. Whatever the reason for using specific labels, place is significant because it encompasses meaning that describes complex relationships between people and community and contributes to the development of a region (Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995).

Southern rural communities present unique characteristics and challenging circumstances that impose various difficulties when trying to define what is rural, describe characteristics of rural communities, and identify and implement improvement strategies (Johnson, 2013; Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Rural communities and regions are not homogeneous. Instead, rural communities and regions are diverse and continually evolving (Johnson, 2013; Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016). Remote rural regions are plagued with a lack of access to decent jobs, poor housing, lack of quality social services, poverty, illiteracy, and limited opportunities (Johnson, 2013). Many rural Black families are unable to improve their life chances because of systemic inequalities, discrimination, and structural forces beyond their control (Iceland, 2013; Johnson, 2013;

Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Individuals living in the rural South are finding it difficult to sustain life and provide for their families (Iceland, 2013).

There are many margins to the forgotten place and the invisible people of the rural South. This region is home to many Black people whose ancestry includes enslavement, physical violence, denied rights, segregation, and emancipation (Anderson, 1988; Anderson, 2017; Bullock, 1976; Dollard, 1988; Harrington, 1963; Horsford, 2011; Kennedy, 2011; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wimberley, 2008, 2010; Wright 1941). Moreover, modern industrial development has evaded this region based on the profitability of economic margins. Furthermore, the historical, political, and economic development of this region is sociologically connected to implications for rural development policies (Johnson, 2013; Cromartie, 2017; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2012; Ratcliff et al., 2016). The geography of the rural South is also crucial because it is connected to social mobility and or isolation, economic prosperity, and overall well-being of the individuals who reside in the region.

Thus, place is intimately connected to the life of a community, influences the fluid identities of community residents, and helps to elucidate the historical essences of a community. Undoubtedly, when deciding on the best definition to characterize rural communities, it is best to be as flexible as possible to account for the many different challenges and characteristics that account for rural places and inclusiveness of population diversity (Cromartie, 2017; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2012; Ratcliff et al., 2016). Therefore, focusing on place aids in understanding the environs that create and sustain a

place, the "Black Belt." This place, the rural Southern Black Belt, is described in the next section.

**The Black Belt**

The Black Belt is a place of significance for Black people. It is the land and a region where their lives began; where their families were born, reared, and for some, died. The historical ties to the rural Southern soil are forever shackled to horrific acts of racial violence and oppression. Although thousands of Black people migrated to urban regions (Wilkerson, 2010), in search of freedom and opportunities, many thousands of Black people; those who did not possess the human capital and resources to migrate; remained in the Black Belt. The Black Belt and the lives of Black people who inhabit this region are linked to the historical legacy of slavery, an American atrocity. This American heritage enslaved Africans, imposed an inferior positionality of Africans, caste and class Africans as inferior beings, dehumanized Africans, and indentured Africans to a land and place supported and sustained by political powers and physical violence (Dollard, 1988).

When describing the Black Belt, the intersectionality of race and place is essential to understanding and capturing the dynamics of rural regions (Colclough, 1988; Hutchinson, 2004; Johnson, 1941; Johnson, 2013; Kennedy, 2011; Lichter, 1989; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). This intersectionality is evident in the manner in which W. E. B. Du Bois captured the essence of the Black Belt. W. E. B. Du Bois is credited as being the first American sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist to use the term Black Belt (Falk et al., 1993). In his essay, The Negro in the Black Belt Some Social Sketches, (1899, as cited in Falk et al., 1993), Du Bois depicted a robust sociological meaning of the historical legacy of slavery and its continuing impact on the lives of Black people

who were caste and class in this atrocious American heritage. According to his depiction, Black people once enslaved, then freed were forever indentured to a status of inferiority. It could be argued that the rural Black Belt is a disadvantaged region of the Southern United States created and sustained by racism and systemic inequalities.

These systemic inequalities were created and sustained by the rural South's historical past practices and statutory laws of dehumanizing Black people and oppressive historical, political, social, and economic contexts that have sustained the regions current conditions of economic decline, political corruption, and social isolation (Dollard, 1988; Falk et al., 1993; Flora et al., 2015; Harrington, 1963; Iceland, 2013). Indeed, the American historical legacy of atrocious racial practices of slavery, sharecropping, and Jim Crow set the rural Southern Black Belt on a racially and culturally destructive course of development. This destructive course set the Black Belt apart from other regions of the United States (Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris, 2000; Beaulieu, 1988; Wimberley, 2010). However, sociologists and historians have differed, slightly, in their depiction and location of the Black Belt.

Traditionally, the Black Belt was designated as regions within the states of Alabama and Georgia (Johnson, 1941; Kennedy 1934, 1940; Odum 1936; Wimberley & Morris, 1997, 2002). However, over the years, this designation of the Black Belt has expanded to include many other regions of states located in the Delta counties of Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, as well as portions of Tennessee and Texas (Falk et al., 1993; Johnson, 1941; Allen-Smith et al., 2000; Wimberley, 2008; Wimberley, 2010). More recent mapping of the Black Belt includes territories of Virginia and Florida (Johnson, 2013). For example, Wimberley (2010) defined the Black Belt as the

"disproportionately rural counties sweeping from eastern Virginia southwest to northern Florida and then west to the Mississippi Delta and eastern Texas" (p. 103, see also, Allen-Smith et al., 2000; Wimberley, 2008). The geographical location of the Black Belt is a place of historical significance as it connects the population to socioeconomic, political, and historical contexts.

According to Lichter (1989), Black people have been historically and overwhelmingly located in the southern rural United States. Overall, the Black Belt consists of southern places where the population of Black people is usually higher than the national average (Wimberley, 2008). For instance, Falk et al., (1993) defined the Black Belt based on racial concentration as identified by census data, "fourteen states where 33% or more of the population is Black" (p. 56, see also Allen-Smith et al., 2000; Wimberley & Morris, 1997, 2002, 2003). According to Wimberley and Morris (2002), Black people constitute 40 percent or more of the population in Black Belt counties. Wimberley and Morris (1997, 2002, 2003) also describe the Black Belt as home to nearly a quarter of the nation's poor, 30 percent of all non-metropolitan poor, and 84 percent of the African American non-metropolitan poor. More recent percentage estimation include work by Webster and Bowman (2008) and Shapley (2015) who described the Black Belt as counties where Black people account for 50 percent or more of the population.

Significantly, the Black Belt is more than just a geographical location; it is intimately linked to population demographics. Falk et al., (1993) and Johnson (2013) posit that the population of Black Belt counties consists of a large proportion of dependent individuals. This proportion of the population is usually under 18 years of age or over the age of 65. This age structure of the Black Belt may confer that this population

may be the least productive regarding contributing to the economic vitality of the Black Belt and require the supplementary assistance of social services. Three additional concerns for the population of Black Belt counties are linked to age structure, out-migration of young professional adults and increased deaths, and fewer births (Johnson, 2013; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). Unfortunately, due to the limited research on rural communities, the Black Belt has become a forgotten place occupied by invisible people (Johnson, 2013; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Lichter, 1989; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). Although the Black Belt is connected to and is accessible by interstates and highways, people who pass through the region rarely stop to explore the area, interact with the locals, or engage in the life of the community (Lichter & Brown, 2011; Lyson & Falk, 1993).

Thus, to appreciate how place contributes to the development of identity, it is crucial to understand the historical significance of place. Falk et al., (1993) commented that bringing the Black Belt back into the national conscience to address the particularly disadvantaged status of the region is essential because inequalities suppress social interactions, economic prosperity, political influence, and equitable opportunities among and across groups (p. 79). This is evident in the research that shows that the Black Belt suffers from lower levels of education, higher unemployment, lower income levels, and more people in poverty than the rest of the southern United States (Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016; Johnson, 2013; Lichter & Brown, 2011; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). Education, employment, income, and poverty are profoundly interrelated and are essential components of socioeconomic progression. Therefore, it is essential to unpack

these areas as they relate to the imposed positionality of inferiority on Black people residing in rural Southern America.

## Invisible People

### Race in America

What is whiteness? What is white privilege? McIntosh (1988) stated it best; white privilege is an "invisible package of unearned assets which I [White people] can count on cashing in each day, but about which I [White people] was "meant" to remain oblivious" (para. 3). Whiteness is an ideology grounded in assimilation, capitalism, and cultural homogeneity (Alexander, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; DiAngelo, 2011; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Molina, 2014). Frankenberg (1993) stated that white privilege and whiteness are complex. Based on the historical repercussions of both ideologies, both terms are rather uncomplicated and simplistic. "White supremacy is the unnamed global political system that has profoundly shaped the modern world" (Mills, 1997, p. 4).

When examining the historical effects of these two concepts, we find that whiteness is keenly connected to, if not synonymous, with being American (Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2014; Frankenberg, 1993) and America's foundation is built on and is sustained by the annihilation and oppression of non-White people (Alexander, 2012; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Freire, 2000; Molina, 2014). According to Mills (1997):

> White supremacy is the background against which other systems are defined. Racism is the global white supremacy and is itself a political system, a particular power structure of formal and informal rules, privilege, socioeconomic advantages, and wealth and power opportunities. (p. 3)

Take for example the government and military force that committed genocide against Indigenous people (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014), deported Mexicans (Molina, 2014), and

enslaved Africans and imprisoned African Americans (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, bureaucratic power was established, created, and implemented to sustain Whiteness principles and White culture.

For instance, the Supreme Court case *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), denied full birthright privileges to free Black people born in the United States. Moreover, the Civil Right Act of 1866 denied Native Americans citizenship, which was reinforced with the *United States v. Balsara* (1910) case declaring American Indians as non-White (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Molina, 2014). Additionally, the Palmer Raids of 1920 and the Zoot Suit Riots in 1943 criminalized Immigrants as enemies of the state who possessed violent characteristics (Molina, 2014). A more recent population control placed on Indigenous people was Alabama's law H. B. 56 (2011) that permitted police officers to patrol as if they were Immigration agents (Molina, 2014). Concluding, Whiteness and White privilege equate to mass destruction of non-White people. So, where is the complexity? Maybe this is yet another way White people hide behind White privilege so as not to have to talk about the destructive nature of Whiteness and White privilege imposed on the lives of people of color. Perhaps this is what Bonilla-Silva (2014) meant when he stated Whites hide behind their color blindness and "claim to be victims of 'reverse racism'" (p. 3).

Whiteness is best understood in relation to non-White groups. According to Molina (2014), White is a hierarchical category with specific rankings, Anglo-Saxons in the first position; Celts, Slavs, Jews, and Mediterranean below Anglo-Saxons; and Mexicans, Indians, and Black people on the bottom of the hierarchical ladder (p. 26). Whites were not considered a race using the same racial categorical standards applied to

Blacks, Indians, and Mexicans. Supreme Court decisions, laws, and treaties were the structural forces that scripted race; thus, enforcing institutional racism and the denial of human rights. Dominant racial scripts connected "racialized groups" (Molina, 2014, p. 6) across time and space, imposing prescribed socialization principles upon groups. The hidden power of these racial scripts is involved each time racial scripts are enforced on groups and or individuals (p. 7).

Exploring the concept of racial scripts reveal that the lives of White people have been enriched by profitable opportunities for quality education, housing, employment, healthcare, and simple pleasures of life. Whereas, the lives of people of color have been impoverished by the lack of opportunities for quality education, housing, employment, healthcare, and simple pleasures of life (Alexander, 2012; Bocian, Ernst, & Li, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Gooden & Thompson Dorsey, 2014; McLaren, 2000; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2003; Skiba et al, 2011; Williams & Mohammed, 2009; Williams & Rucker, 2000). The lives of people of color are contained within the structure of white privilege suppressing equality and equity (Alexander, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; DiAngelo, 2011; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Molina, 2014).

One example of white privilege suppressing equality and equity is the comments of Chief Justice Taney regarding the imposed positionality of Black people:

> Blacks had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold, and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it (*Scott v. Sandford* 60 U.S. 393, 1857).

This infamous judicial precedent not only caste Black people as an inferior race based on perceived hereditary constructs, but also classed Black people as a production of the lowest socioeconomic status forever barred from social mobility, thus, establishing a sociopolitical imposed positionality of inferiority of Black people.

Why do white people feel the need to deny freedom to people of color, enforce racist paradigms on the lives of people of color, dominate and control people of color, and kill and steal to maintain their status? It is not the destructive concepts of Whiteness and White privilege that are complex, but the cataclysmic operations of these ideologies. It appears that when White people feel that their way of life is being threatened, they change the rules and the language of the game to maintain an advantage over people of color (Alexander, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2014; DiAngelo, 2011). Whites who have stolen power and status have the legal, political, and economic power to create and implement new rules and political systems to justify new language and social consensus to bring about an advanced racial order that conforms to the needs and constraints of the time. Just because the language used to write laws are presumably race-neutral, does not mean the enforcement of such laws is race-neutral (Alexander, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2014; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Molina, 2014).

Whiteness and white privilege allow whites to avoid a critical analysis of discriminatory practices and the negative impact of these practices on the lives of people of color and their hopes and desires to live productive and meaningful lives (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Even for Whites who take up the challenge to address the unearned advantages of white privilege and systemic racism, they do not typically take action to dismantle or ameliorate their White privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; DiAngelo,

2011; Patton & Bondi, 2015). What is more common for White people is to position themselves to assist people of color to be more like them, because after all, according to the foundation of White privilege, success and will are an individual processes with no ties to structural inequalities or societal hierarchies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; DiAngelo, 2011; Frankenberg, 1993; Castagno, 2014; McIntosh, 1988). This position allows whites to enjoy white privilege and blame the collateral damages birth out of White privilege on people of color. Bonilla-Silva (2014) captured this notion when he referred to the United States postindustrial social and economic changes of the 1950s and 1960s Laissez-faire racist ideology that blamed Black people for their economic conditions (p. 7). Whiteness and White privilege are the parameters of deliberate acts committed to systematically attack and destroy specific populations for capitalism, power, and status (Alexander, 2012). "What are we going to do about white crime" (Alexander, 2012, p. 198)? More specifically, "are we serious about ending this system of control, or not?" (Alexander, 2012, p. 233).

**Imposed Positionality of Black People**

According to Dollard (1988), "caste and class distinctions" are not only "ways of dividing people according to the behavior expected of them in a society," but also an indication of the "relations in which people stand to one another " (p. 61). The American caste, its society, and heritage, has been baptized in the blood of racism and white bigotry. The American social class is based on wealth, education, political office, military rank, or other personal accomplishments. This American caste and class system has positioned Black people as the other Americans; barred from humanity.

Enslaved Africans were emancipated in 1863 (Anderson, 1988), and during the late 1860s and 1870s, freed Africans temporarily joined the nation as free citizens and entered into new political and social systems of republican government and capitalism. However, this new found freedom was quickly destroyed by racially charged federal and state governmental organizations and tactics that sought to disfranchise freed Black men and Black women (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). Some white southerners were unhappy with the outcome of the Civil War and the adoption of the 13th Amendment. Thus, southern states passed de jure segregation and practiced de facto segregation not only to separate Black people and white people but also to authorize legal punishments for violation of Black codes and Jim Crow Laws (Black, 1960; Davis, 1989; Dollard, 1988; Hansan, 2011; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). The imposed socioeconomic positionality of Black citizens under Jim Crow rule condemned Black people to an inferior status in comparison to white citizens.

This socioeconomic positioning of rural southern Black people is the result of profoundly rooted slavery; historical racism; and social, economic, and political oppression (Beaulieu, 1988; Falk et al., 1993; Goldfield, 1991; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). After the abolition of slavery, Black people in the South often worked as sharecroppers, primarily because they were banned by law or custom from most other full-time jobs outside the Black community (Beaulieu, 1988; Dollard, 1988; Falk et al., 1993; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963; Iceland, 2013). Black people, who comprised close to 30% of the US population, historically had to contend with acute forms of discrimination, and severely constrained labor market throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century (Iceland, 2013).

For example, Black people were legally mandated to use separate facilities including, but not limited to, water fountains, restrooms, restaurants, schools, and churches (Davis, 1989;

Dollard, 1988; Hansan, 2011; Hoelscher, 2003). Freed Black people were once again trapped by civil and political subordination enforced by Southern laws, statutes, and social customs. Black people were denied citizenship, the right to vote, the right to an education, and the right to control their labor power (Anderson, 1988; Molina, 2014). To most southern whites, Black people remained an invisible and inferior group of individuals to be exploited for personal gain (Falk et al., 1993; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Harrington, 1963). Thus, although slavery was outlawed in the 1860s, it did not end; it evolved.

Chattel slavery metamorphosed into a sharecropping system (Falk et al., 1993). Slavery and sharecropping share a commonality of indentured servitude of Blacks. This indentured servitude involved the exchanged of Black people's labor as a commodity for profit operated by white plantation owners. The Southern United States was set on a course of development shaped and influenced by the slavery regime that created and sustained a historical legacy of socioeconomic perplexities and discriminatory legal statutes that impeded Southern rural development and policies for generations (Beaulieu, 1988).

Consequently, racism and discriminatory practices and statutes against Black people in the rural Southern United States have historically contributed to established social inequalities and enhanced social isolation. Black people who occupy these regions live outside of mainstream American society. This social isolation is detrimental to the livelihood of Black people living in the rural South. Such isolation results in limited resources, economic deficits including low-wage employment and poverty, inadequate public infrastructures, poor physical and mental health facilities, lack of political representation, and second-class education (Beaulieu, 1988; Dollard, 1937; Flora et al., 2015; Spring, 2016).

The economic, political, and social problems in the rural Southern Black Belt of the United States are due to chronic poverty, high unemployment, and population decline all of which are rooted in persistent racist and discriminatory practices (Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995). Racism is an incessant omnipresent foe attached to the lives of Black people living in the rural South and it gives birth to historically economic, political, and social oppression and current regional crisis (Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2014; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Living in poverty produces multiple obstacles for adults and children. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, social isolation and limited mobility, limited access to quality and equitable educational opportunities, inadequate physical and mental healthcare, increase in mortality rates, and competition for limited resources (Iceland, 2013). Black people living in poverty are the cumulative collateral damage of historical social, political, and economic oppression of a racist America. Consequently, many Black people living in the rural Black Belt are unable to secure the types of employment that would allow them to achieve a middle-class level of living. Without equitable opportunities, rural families are unable to improve their lives (Iceland, 2013; Lyson & Falk, 1993).

According to Iceland (2013), economists posit that the Black-White wage gap is a result of "prejudice, suggesting that racism continues to contribute to African American economic disadvantage" (p. 92). Racist and discriminatory labor practices and denied educational opportunities play a critical role in the production of poverty for Black people. Black people living in poverty grew out of racist American society and economy that positioned and sustained Black people as the "other" American, minoritized and inferior (Alexander, 2012; Anderson,

1988, Beaulieu, 1988; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Dollard, 1988; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963; Wilder, 2014).

Poverty rates are connected to the supply and demand of a regions' labor market (Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995). For the rural South, unemployment increased between the years 1970 to 1985 (Falk et al., 1993). More specifically, the unemployment rate for the Black Belt increased from 4.8% in 1972 to 10.3% in 1985. The United States Census Bureau (2012) examined the official poverty rate by region and race during the years 1959 – 2015. According to data from the United States Census Bureau (2012), the South experienced higher poverty rates than the Midwest from 2000 – 2015 (Table 2.1). In addition, historically, Black people age 18-64 experience higher poverty rates than whites of the same age range (Table 2.2).

Table 2.1:

*Distribution of the Poor, by Region: 1959 to 2015*

| Year | South | | Midwest | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| 2015 | 18,305 | 42.4 | 7,849 | 18.2 |
| 2014 | 19,531 | 41.9 | 8,714 | 18.7 |
| 2001 | 13,515 | 41.1 | 5,966 | 18.1 |
| 2000 (12) | 12,705 | 40.2 | 5,916 | 18.7 |
| 1990 | 13,456 | 40.1 | 7,458 | 22.2 |
| 1980 | 12,363 | 42.2 | 6,592 | 22.5 |
| 1970 | 11,480 | 45.2 | (NA) | (NA) |
| 1960 | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) |
| 1959 | 19,116 | 48.4 | (NA) | (NA) |

Table 2.2:

*Poverty of People, by Age and Race: 1959 to 2015*

| Year | WHITE 18 – 64 | | | BLACK 18 – 64 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | Below poverty | | Total | Below poverty | |
| | | Number | Percent | | Number | Percent |
| 2015 | 151,731 | 16,325 | 10.8 | 26,194 | 5,568 | 21.3 |
| 2014 | 151,562 | 18,086 | 11.9 | 25,954 | 5,869 | 22.6 |
| 2001 | 143,796 | 12,555 | 8.7 | 21,462 | 4,018 | 18.7 |
| 2000(12) | 142,164 | 11,754 | 8.3 | 21,160 | 3,794 | 17.9 |
| 1990 | 129,784 | 11,387 | 8.8 | 18,097 | 4,427 | 24.5 |
| 1980 | 118,935 | 9,478 | 8.0 | 14,987 | 3,835 | 25.6 |
| 1970 | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) |
| 1960 | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) | (NA) |

Employment opportunities within a region are connected to the economic success of a community and the livelihoods of individuals who reside in that community (Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris, 2000; Falk & Lyson, 1988; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Wimberley, 2010). Traditional employment industries for Southern rural areas consisted of agricultural, mining, and manufacturing (Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995). The occupation structure of the Black Belt experienced a structural change in its employment sectors with the elimination of the sharecropping system and mechanization of farming (Beaulieu, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Falk et al., 1993).

In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, a significant change occurred in the structure of employment in the Black Belt. The employment in the Black Belt experienced a decline in its agricultural labor force due to the dismantling of the sharecropping system and mechanization, which produced a decreased in the agricultural labor force, but an increase in manufacturing employment. Interestingly, manufacturing employment was concentrated in rural counties and was significant in the rural Black Belt counties (Falk & Lyson, 1988; Lichter, 1989; Lichter & Brown, 2011; Lichter, Parisi & Taquino, 2012; Lyson & Falk, 1993).

Another significant employment crisis happened in the 1980s when rural Black Belt residents were mostly employed in manufacturing jobs. The manufacturing industry suffered a significant loss, and unemployment rates in the rural South increased significantly (Beaulieu, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995). The rural South had fewer professional white-collar jobs and a limited number of low-wage, less-skilled employment opportunities (Beaulieu, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Falk & Lyson, 1988). Consequently, industries evaluate the percentage of the adult population with high school degrees when determining the profitability of locating its business within a region (Lyson & Falk, 1993).

In 1970, 65% of the adult population in Southern counties had less than a 12th-grade education. In 1980, this percentage decreased to 50%. For the Black Belt rural counties, 71% of adults had less than a 12th-grade education in 1970. This percentage decreased to 57% in 1980 (Lyson & Falk, 1993). Consequently, low-wage industries are attracted to low educational regions because they do not have to pay a living wage (Falk

et al., 1993; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Economic conditions of a region are linked to the educational attainment of its residents.

When compared to other counties, the Black Belt counties' per capita income is less than half of the national average, infant mortality rates are higher, life expectancy lower, illiteracy more prevalent, and welfare benefits minimal (Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris, 2000; Beaulieu, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Falk & Lyson, 1988; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Wimberley, 2008, 2010; Wimberley & Morris, 2002, 2003). Many who live in these areas lack access to decent jobs, housing, and the types of social services that are taken for granted in much of urban America. The more isolated the county, the more significant the economic gap with the rest of the nation. The dismal economic conditions found in many rural regions today can be seen as a historical process of depressing social, economic, and political contexts that have manifested different trajectories of growth and development.

## Repressed Education

The historical evolution of Black education is essential to understanding the political ideologies that framed Black education. The legal underpinnings of this historical evolution of schooling for African Americans are, without pause, pregnant with inequalities that are linked to slavery and legalized oppression and racist ideologies (Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1995). The historical recount of Black literacy is replete with narratives about the repressed educational attainment of enslaved Black people (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wright, 1941). A critical evaluation of the legal frameworks that repress Black education reveals a well-crafted deceptive operation. This well-crafted

deceptive operation is grounded in white supremacy political and legal contexts that sustain racial and class systems of systemic racism (Ahmed, 2012; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Castagno, 2014; Delpit, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Tyack, 1974; Valenzuela, 1999; Wilder, 2014).

Scholars, such as Anderson (1988), Anderson (2017), Bullock (1967), Cornelius (1983), Davis (1989), Goldfield (1991), Horsford (2011), Kendi (2016), Kennedy (2011), Walker (1996), Solórzano and Yosso (2002), Tate (1995), Wimberley (2010), Woodson (1919) and Wright (1941) have written narratives that reflect various sentiments regarding Black education and the progression of plantation life. These narratives are typically framed from two arguments, the dominant white master narrative, and the critical counter-narrative. The dominant white master narrative positions whites as saviors of enslaved Black people. For example, the dominant white master narrative recounts stories regarding the monetary investment slave masters made so that their enslaved males could learn a trade (e.g., carpentry, machinery, iron foundry) while at the same time, learn to read and write.

Although some white slave owners may have allowed enslaved Black people to learn to read and write while learning a trade, white slave owners were interested in advancing the literacy or social skill of their slaves because it profited them to do so (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Woodson, 1919). Critical Race Theory (CRT) refers to this behavior of Whites as interest convergence. CRT is a one theoretical framework that provides a critical analysis of the history of United States education policies and practices in relationship with intersections of race, power, and law (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings,

1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Interest convergence is best understood as the behavior of whites who engage in social justice only when doing so does not require an alteration in their unearned privileged status or provides some benefit be it social, political, and or economical to their quality of life (Anderson, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2017; Harris, 1993; Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2000). A critical counter-narrative is a second argument that frames Black education and the progression of plantation life.

This critical counter-narrative presents at least two critical race evaluations. First, enslaved Black people were considered the property of white male owners, not human beings (Anderson, 1988; Anderson, 2017; Bullock, 1967; Cornelius, 1983; Davis, 1989; Goldfield, 1991; Horsford, 2011; Kendi, 2014; Kennedy, 2011). Enslaved males were not free to live an independent life. Second, the return on monetary investments made by white slave masters was reaped in two ways. First, because white slave masters had improved the quality of their stock, enslaved Black males, white slave masters could hire out their enslaved males to other white slave masters for a price. Moreover, the monetary investment to improve the quality of stock meant that the profitability of white men's stock would reap a significant return on investment during auction time (Anderson, 1988; Anderson, 2017; Bullock, 1967; Cornelius, 1983; Davis, 1989; Goldfield, 1991; Horsford, 2011; Kendi, 2014; Kennedy, 2011). Because this study seeks to explore the oral histories of elderly African Americans who survived the Jim Crow era, this review concentrates on the counter-narrative that centers the stories and experiences of enslaved Black people as the force required to challenge and expose deficit informed paradigm. A

critical analysis of this social interaction between slave and master reveals the harsh realities of racist ideologies and practices that repressed education for Blacks.

White planters and slave owners controlled the political, economic, and social contexts of the rural South (Dollard, 1988; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963). Whites were not in favor of public education, or any education, for enslaved and/or freed Black people. Behold, whites fought to convince enslaved and freed Black people that their conception of education was the natural order of things (Anderson, 1988). They feared that if Black people learned to read and write, they would rebel (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Spring, 2016). The white planters tolerated education for poor white children, but adamantly rejected public education or the state intervening on the right to an education for Black people (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Dollard, 1988; Harrington, 1963). The white planters' resistance was able to halt the advancement of Black education in the 1870s by imposing coercive labor, restrictive labor mobility, and reducing wages (Anderson, 1988).

Under the American historical legacy of slavery, enslaved Black men and women were positioned as the property of white slave owners. This positioning meant that enslaved Black people had no rights that whites had to acknowledge or respect, which included the right to an education, as proclaimed by Chief Justice Taney's opinion (*Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 1857):

> In the opinion of the court, the legislation and histories of the times, and the language used in the Declaration of Independence, show, that neither the class of persons who had been imported as slaves, nor their descendants, whether they had become free or not, where the acknowledged as a part of the people, nor intended to be included in the general words used in that memorable instrument…They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political

> relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.

Chief Justice Taney's message of white supremacy, racist ideology, and separation of the races was conspicuously clear. Accordingly, *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) was yet another infamous Supreme Court Case that upheld constitutional racial segregation. In this case, Justice Henry Billings Brown gave the majority opinion declaring that laws declaring the separation of races were constitutional inasmuch public spaces and services were equal. Thus, the infamous quote, separate but equal, was emanated. Moreover, let us not forget the Mississippi senator Jefferson Davis' speech to the United States Senate on April 12, 1860, in which, he declared that the government was not founded by or for Negroes; thus, no funding should be allocated to the education of Negroes (Kendi, 2016). There are at least five key supplementary Supreme Court Cases involving race discrimination in admission and public funding that are critical to understanding the battle Black students and families fought to gain equitable education opportunities. These cases include, *Bob Jones University v. United States* (1983), *Runyon v. McCrary* (1976), *Norwood v. Harrison* (1973), *Alexander v. Holmes* (1969), and *Griffin v. Prince Edward County* (1964). These legal frameworks supported and sustained by the Supreme Court, and racist propaganda provides a clear connection to the destructive dominant narrative of white supremacy and systemic racism. Furthermore, the separate but equal legal regulations established by the two infamous Supreme Court cases, *Scott v. Sandford* (1857) and *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) helped to establish a legal precedent for contemporary systemic education inequality.

For instance, the Supreme Court case *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), a freedom of choice desegregation plan, placed the onus of integration on African American students; thus, did not eradicate segregated schools. Consequently, the Supreme Court cases *Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell* (1991), *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992), and *Missouri v. Jenkins* (1995) enforced dismissing desegregation orders allowing for a return to neighborhood schools even if doing so meant returning to segregated schools (Orfield, Frankenberg, Lee, 2003). Additionally, the Supreme Court ruled in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) against compulsory metropolitan desegregation unless it could be proven that suburban districts behaved with deliberate segregative intent. According to Frankenberg and Sigel-Hawley (2009), this ruling not only limited the scope of desegregation remedies but also reduced legal protection and equitable education possibilities for racialized and minoritized neighborhoods. Another Supreme Court case negated the Brown's decision for equal opportunity to learn, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriquez* (1973). The decision, in this case, declared it was constitutionally permissible for enormous disparities in funding to continue to exist between rich and poor school districts throughout the county

These disparities include a decrease in the number of highly effective teachers in high poverty and low resourced school districts (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Presley, White, & Gong, 2005; Quay, 2011; Sunderman & Kim, 2005), a return to segregated schools (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, Wang, & Orfield, 2012; Levin, 2012; Morra, 1995; Palmer & Gau, 2003), disproportionality in school discipline (Fabelo, et al., 2011; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba, et al., 2011), a lack of essential education resources (Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010), and staffing teacher vacancies

with less experienced teachers in high poverty and disadvantaged schools (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Presley et al., 2005; Quay, 2011; Sunderman & Kim, 2005). Accordingly, these historical, political, and legal contexts shifted the purpose and view of public education to a private commodity where students are considered and treated as consumers.

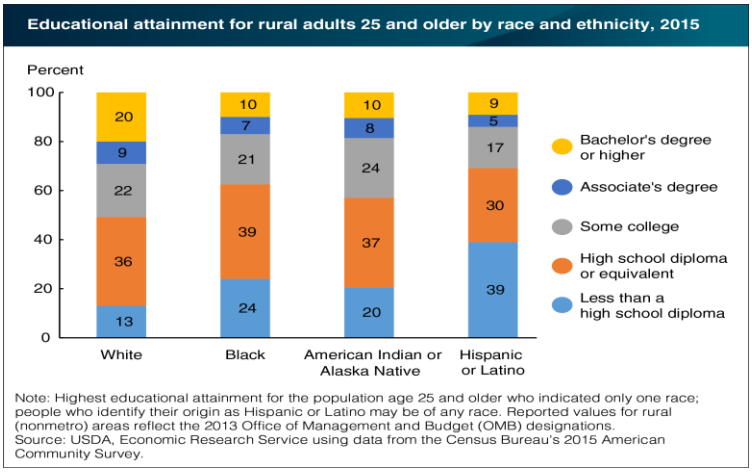
The fundamental principle of capitalism, supply, and demand has come to rule the day with regard to access to education. Privatization of education is the take over by corporate entities and big banks for profit and increased competition. The belief is that competition provides better quality, increases market demands, and improves globalization (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 2002; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Tierney, 2011). Globalization is an international process with the aim of integration and collaboration across and within governmental departments, nations, countries, and bureaucracies (Tierney, 2011). The term globalization appears to be inclusive and harmless.

However, globalization is not a nicely paved linear path. Globalization assumes that all educational contexts are equal and that all individuals have an equal opportunity to engage in the education process at the same point with identical resources (Tierney, 2011). Education, within this context, is seen as the driving tool for the advancement of competition in the global market. Within this system, students become customers, and education becomes the product (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Giroux, 2002; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Tierney, 2011). Market-driven education reform is obsessed with standardized testing, punitive standards, and neo-liberal policies and practices. Education is on the auction block of profit-driven corporations.

The paradigm driving this for-profit takeover of public education is the notion that all individuals have equal capital, be it political, monetary, and/or social. Additionally, all individuals have equal access to "quality" education. Historically marginalized, racialized, and ostracized students and families have never been provided an equal opportunity to participate, let alone to acquire the necessary resources to compete for what has now become the so-called elite education that is supposed to open doors to endless possibilities (Anderson, 1988; Anderson, 2017; Haveman & Smeeding, 2006; Kendi, 2014; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). Boggs and Kurashige (2011) and Giroux (2014) suggested that there is a need for a "paradigm shift" (Boggs & Kurashige, 2012, p. 136) in how educators go about addressing the education dilemma. Furthermore, Boggs and Kurashige (2011) support youth in their rebellion against educational systems that dehumanize them and treat them as if they were mere trinkets on an assembly line or cogs in the corporate machine. Similarly, Stovall (2016) posits that social justice situates education within a humanistic paradigm where people ask critical questions and make informed decisions that ultimately improve humanity both individually and collectively (p. 110).

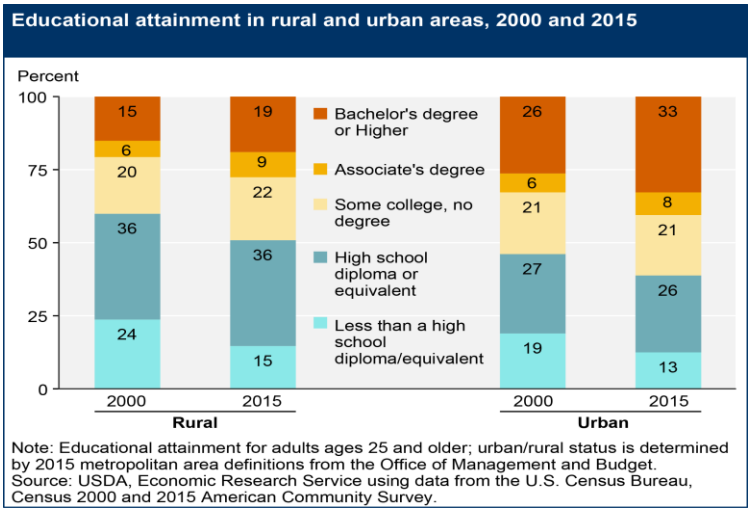
According to data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey and other Federal statistical sources on the educational attainment of rural adults, the relationship between educational attainment and economic indicators stipulate that the educational attainment of non-white populations living in rural communities is significantly lower than non-minoritized populations (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017), (Figure 2.1).

*Figure 2.1:* Educational Attainment for Rural Adults




Although the educational attainment of people living in rural areas has increased over time, it is still below that of urban and suburban residents (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017) (Figure 2.2).

*Figure 2.2:* Educational Attainment of Rural and Non-rural adults




The link between educational attainment and labor markets has a profound impact on economic prosperity. Poverty in the rural South is a direct result of employment supply and demand. Black people living in the rural South have historically suffered from high rates of poverty due to systemic racism and oppression (Anderson, 1988; Bullock,

1967; Dudenhefer, 1993; Falk et al., 1993; Iceland, 2013; United States Department of Agriculture, 2017; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005).

Instead of addressing the systemic inequalities of poverty and racial segregation, piecemeal options, vouchers, school choice, and charter schools were implemented. For example, the Regan administration, 1981-1989, introduced a new education regime aimed at attacking the supposedly failing public education system. Furthermore, education policies were drafted to address and advocate for aggressive academic requirements that were supposed to prepare students for global competition. These educational policies were outlined in two historical legislative reports, The War on Poverty and A Nation at Risk (Frankenberg & Sigel-Hawley, 2009). Unfortunately, neoliberal rhetoric has hijacked what is considered education and the purpose of education (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Giroux, 2002, 2003, 2014; Kezar, 2004; Oparah, 2014; Stovall, 2016).

What is this neoliberal rhetoric? Neoliberal ideology is grounded in promoting the self-interest of the elite and wealthy through policies such as privatization, deregulation, globalization, and tax cuts (Kezar, 2004; Patton, 2016; Tierney, 2011). Neoliberal philosophy emphasizes the value of the free market with minimal governmental intervention in economic and social affairs. Neoliberal ideology refers to education as a public good with a considerable profit margin supported and controlled by private enterprise (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Tierney, 2011). As a result, students and parents are finding out that access to education, especially what is considered quality education by colonized standards, comes with a hefty price tag, does not equate to equality, and that the "neoliberal marketplace ideology" (Stovall, 2016, p. 40) considers students and

parents as customers. The neoliberal takeover of education is solely concerned with a profit margin that is defined by "high-stakes standards test scores as the sole purveyor of educational achievement" (pp. 41-42).

Patel (2015) pointed out that the institution of education is not culturally neutral or equitable. The institution of education is constructed culturally and socially with a specific purpose determined and established by those in a position of privilege, mainly white male Eurocentric aristocrats. The foundation of education was engrossed in a "patriarchal, Eurocentric society" and immersed in massive forms of oppression (p.11). Ergo, we must not only engage in dialectical thinking and critical conversations, but also embrace a critical and essential transformation and liberation of our socially constructed paradigms and pedagogy if we are serious about creating and sustaining an education revolution that addresses the true purpose of an education (Boggs & Kurashige, 2011; Freire, 2000). Hence, Black people fighting for educational equality have been a lingering, treacherous endeavor.

## Creation of Black Schools

The treacherous endeavor taken by Black people to improve their literacy was often done is secret. One example is the story of Elizabeth Sparks, an enslaved Black woman, who held secret meetings known as " 'stealin' the meetin" in the slave quarters to conduct literacy lessons (Anderson, 1988, p. 17). Typically, enslaved men and women paid an exorbitant price to learn to read and write. For example, enslaved Thomas H. Jones was brutally whipped three times for learning how to read while hiding in the back of his master's store (Anderson, 1988, pp. 16, 17). Regardless of the harsh punishment, enslaved Black people were determined to become literate.

This determination is evident in the historical accounts of Black communities and families supporting their literacy efforts. Black families and Black communities provided not only emotional support and encouragement, and established high standards of educational expectations of teachers and students, but also provided monetary support to assist with buying or renovating school buildings and buying or paying for transportation so students could get to school (Anderson, 1988; Anderson 2017; Bullock, 1967; Kendi, 2016; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). Regardless of limited resources, the support from Black communities and families allowed for advancement in the establishment of schools for Black children. They journeyed on invoking an educational revolution.

This education revolution came in the form of the establishment of Black schools, which were in force pre and post-Civil War. Such schools included the Froumontaine school that opened around 1818 and whose founder was Julian Froumontaine, a Black Frenchman from Santo Domingo (Wright, 1894). Additionally, the Pioneer School of Freedom, which was established in New Orleans in the 1860s, by enslaved and freed Black people (Du Bois, 1901 as cited in Anderson 1988). Likewise, the Fortress Monroe was opened in 1861 under the leadership of a Black female teacher, Mary Peake. Conjointly, the Zion School opened in 1865 with entirely Black personnel. Mutually, numerous "Sabbath" (Anderson, 1988, p. 12) schools and church-sponsored schools operated during pre and post Civil War.

According to Anderson (1988) and Walker (1996), John W. Alvord, the national superintendent for the Freedman's Bureau, reported the existence of approximately 500 schools created and sustained by enslaved and freed Black people. Images 2.1 and 2.2 are examples of schools created by Black people.

*Image 2.1:* James' Plantation School in North Carolina

*Note.* Image courtesy of Learn NC http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-civilwar/8.0.

*Image 2.2:* African American School for Black children in Virginia

*Note*. Imaged retrieved from https://www.virginiahistory.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/civil-rights-movement-virginia/beginnings-black

Establishing these schools was no small task. These heroic enslaved and freed Black men and women risked their lives and possible mutilation to become literate (Anderson, 1988; Anderson, 2017; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). This historical fight for literacy is best understood as liberation from oppression. According to Gee (2015), language "always comes fully attached to "other stuff": to social relations, cultural

models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world" (p. vii). In this review, literacy positioned in place and historical context is a weapon of liberation.

Bullock (1967) provided a clear picture of the literacy achievements of enslaved Black people across several southern states during 1890 - 1930 (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3:

*Literacy Percentage Negro Population, 25 Years of Age or Older*

| States | 1890 | 1930 | Percent Increase |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Alabama** | 30.1 | 73.8 | 145.2 |
| **Arkansas** | 46.4 | 83.9 | 80.8 |
| **Florida** | 49.5 | 81.2 | 64.0 |
| **Georgia** | 32.7 | 80.1 | 145.0 |
| **Kentucky** | 44.1 | 84.6 | 91.8 |
| **Louisiana** | 27.9 | 76.7 | 174.9 |
| **Mississippi** | 39.2 | 76.8 | 95.9 |
| **North Carolina** | 39.9 | 79.4 | 99.0 |
| **Oklahoma** | 61.0 | 90.7 | 48.7 |
| **South Carolina** | 35.9 | 73.1 | 103.6 |
| **Tennessee** | 45.8 | 85.1 | 85.5 |
| **Texas** | 47.5 | 86.6 | 82.3 |
| **Virginia** | 42.8 | 80.8 | 88.9 |
| **Total** | 41.8 | 81.0 | 93.8 |

Black people pursued their education against the odds, and their literacy improved over the years. Anderson (1988) recorded the improvement of the illiteracy rate of Black people as 95 percent illiterate in 1860 to 30 percent illiterate by 1910. Additionally, during this period, a number of these formerly enslaved men and women, who had acquired their education as enslaved individuals, joined the antislavery movement and used their literacy not only to speak out against enslavement but also to invoke an education revolution aimed at establishing schools for Black children.

These pre and post-historical Civil War Black educators include Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback, Kate Drumgoold, Lucy C. Laney, William Sanders Scarborough, Mary Church Terrell, Fredrick Douglas, and Suzie King Taylor, to name a few (Anderson, 1988). They became education crusaders for education reform that provided education emancipation for enslaved Black people. Thus, early Black schools were not only supported, but also established by the desire and efforts of enslaved and freed Black people to support their emancipation and ultimately to have control over their own lives (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005). How does this exploration of education in the South connect with the state of Arkansas?

## Arkansas Public Education

Even before *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), Negro school children residing in Arkansas were battling for their opportunity to attain a quality education. According to Smith (1960), "If school integration in the South were to continue at its 1959 rate, it would take four thousand years for all Southern Negro children to achieve their right to equal educational opportunity"(para. 1). The goal of the Arkansas' placement laws was to integrate the least number of Black students, thus,

perpetuating segregation. Furthermore, Arkansas' placement laws represented white people's legal power of noncompliance and defiance to integration of all-white schools. According to the Smith (1960), Black students were denied admission to white schools based on suspicious reasoning:

> … in the assignment, transfer or continuance of pupils among and within the schools, or within the classroom and other facilities thereof, the following factors and the effect or results there of shall be considered, with respect to the individual pupil...the adequacy of the pupils academic preparation for admission to a particular school and curriculum; the Scholastic aptitude and relative intelligence or mental energy or ability of the pupil; the psychological qualification of the pupil for the type of teaching and associations involved…the home environment of the pupil; the maintenance or severance of established social and physical logical relationships with other peoples and with teacher; the choice and interests of the pupil; the morals, conduct, health and personal standards of the pupil.
> (Section 4)

Although the enrollment law applied to the placement of all students regardless of race in all schools, the law was not invoked until a Negro student applied for a transfer to an all white school. For example, a group of Negro school-age children filed suit against the Board of Directors of the Dollarway School District, which is located in Jefferson County, Arkansas, claiming that their rights and privileges as citizens were being denied because they were denied the right to enroll in schools open to all other children of school-age in their district. The plaintiffs sought relief of the Arkansas statues that forced Black students to attend segregated and separate schools based on their race alone. The Supreme Court ruled that indeed the plaintiffs of this case did exhaust all possible remedies under the Arkansas Pupil Assignment Act of 1959 and that the officers of the school district and its Board of Directors did deny students' right to enroll in school (*Dove v Parham,* 1959).

**Arkansas Legal Cases**

The Supreme Court declared that racial discrimination in public education unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1954) and that states shall implement integration plans with all deliberate speed in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1955). The state of Arkansas took a passive-aggressive approach to address school integration. States guilty of racial discrimination in public education were permitted to present their views on how relief or integration should occur. Arkansas was one of the six states that participated in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1955) argument. The other states included Florida, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Maryland, and Texas.

While the School Board had established and were moving forward with desegregating the Little Rock Arkansas school system, other state authorities were pursuing a different agenda that would perpetuate Arkansas in a system of racial segregation. The first wave of such a system of racial segregation came in the form of an amendment to the Arkansas State Constitution directly opposing the United States Supreme Court rulings in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1954) and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1955). Arkansas constituted a pupil assignment law, Ark. Stats. 80-1519 to 80-1524, in November 1956 that relieved schoolchildren from compulsory attendance at racially mixed schools.

Furthermore, in November of 1956, the Little Rock school system and state authorities submitted an amendment to the State Constitution of Arkansas ordering the Arkansas General Assembly to oppose the Supreme Court rulings in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1954) and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1955).. This

amendment, Ark. Const. Amend. 44 through pupil assignment law, Ark. Stats. 80-1519 to 80-1524 in accordance with state constitutional command, Ark. Stats. 80-1525, which relieved school children from compulsory attendance at racially mixed schools, and State Sovereignty Commission, Ark. Stats 6-801 to 6-824, was enacted by the General Assembly in February 1957. While the legal battle to keep Negro children out of white schools was raging, the School Board and the Superintendent of Schools proceeded with the first stage of the Little Rock, Arkansas desegregation plans.

Nine Negro children, Minnijean Brown, Terrance Roberts, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Patillo, Gloria Ray, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls, known as the Little Rock Nine, were recruited by the President of the Arkansas branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Daisy Bates, for admission into Little Rock Central High School in September 1957. At this time, Central High School's student population was more than 2000 white students. On September 2, 1957, the Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, who adamantly opposed Negro students attending all-white schools, dispatched the Arkansas National Guard to the grounds of Central High School to prohibit the Negro children from entering the school. The governor's action represents the power of whiteness on an individual level created and sustained by systemic white supremacy and racism. Governor Faubus did not consult school authorities, the Arkansas Mayor, the Chief of Police, or any other official of the state government before carrying out his violent racist actions against Negro children. Furthermore, Governor Faubus used his power and position to deploy a unit of the Arkansas National Guard to carry out destructive acts of oppression.

On September 20, 1957, the District Court granted a preliminary injunction prohibiting the Governor and the officers of the Guard from preventing the attendance of Negro children at Central High School, *Faubus v United States*, (1958). The Negro children were escorted to school under the protection of the Little Rock Police Department on September 23, 1957. However, the Negro children's education was interrupted in the early start of the school day when the Little Rock Police Department removed the children from school due to the violent threats of white mobs. Consequently, on September 25, 1957, President Eisenhower dispatched federal troops to Central High School to protect the Negro children from white rage. These federal troops stayed at Central High until November 27, 1957, when they were replaced by federalized National Guardsmen who remained as protectors of the Negro children and enforcers of law and order throughout the school year. Interestingly, the racist, violent actions of authority figures and community members were never addressed or punished. Instead, the School Board and the Superintendent of Schools filed a petition with the District Court on February 20, 1958, asking that the desegregation plan be postponed for a period of two and one-half years due to extreme public hostility primarily engendered by the official attitudes and actions of the Governor and the Legislature.

Dangerously, the District Court granted the petition. On June 20, 1958, the District Court argued that the education of the students had suffered from conditions of "chaos, bedlam, and turmoil," "repeated incidents of more or less serious violence directed against the Negro students and their property," a school official was threatened with violence, and a "serious financial burden"(*Cooper v Aaron,* 358 U.S., 13 (1958) had been placed on the School District; therefore, the school district needed continuous

protection from the military and or local police department. Thus, the school's district desegregation plan was postponed for two and one-half years to address the issues mentioned above and to develop a more effective desegregation plan.

The decrees outlined in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1955) were to be guided by equitable principles. At the time, equity was characterized as "practical flexibility in shaping its remedies and by a facility for adjusting and reconciling public and private needs" (Teaching American History, p. 2). Furthermore, schools (states) were instructed to admit Negro students to public schools as soon as practicable on a non-discriminatory basis. This lack of direct immediacy allowed for states to justify the implementation of school integration at a pace pleasing to their own lacking without regards to the educational needs of Negro students.

Consequently, the Little Rock District School Board adopted and made public their statement of policy to follow the decrees outlined in the *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) as soon as the Supreme Court of the United States provided instructions on how to desegregate public schools. This statement of policy by the Little Rock District School Board was adopted on May 23, 1954. The Little Rock District School Board desegregation plan was to start in the fall of 1957. The first step was to desegregate the senior high school grades 10 - 12 and then desegregate the junior high and elementary schools. Desegregation completion was scheduled for 1963. A group of Negro children challenged the Little Rock District School Board desegregation plan arguing for more rapid completion of desegregation of Little Rock public schools legal case (*Cooper v Aaron,* 1958).

The *Cooper v Aaron* (1958) case, a plan of gradual desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas public schools, was approved by the courts, and Negro children were admitted to all-white schools at the beginning of the 1957-1958 school year. However, the legislature and governor of Arkansas opposed desegregation and argued that due to threats of mob violence and chaos and turmoil in the schools, the educational process was disrupted; therefore, they requested in 1958 that their gradual desegregation plan be suspended for two and one-half years. The District Court approved their petition in June 1958. This approval was reversed by the Court of Appeals ordering Little Rock, Arkansas public school desegregation plans be reinstated effective immediately.

In addition, the Court of Appeals concluded that if a District Court can justify non-segregated admission of all qualified Negro children to public schools, then the District Court should scrutinize whether or not the school authorities' desegregation program had made arrangements toward the earliest practicable completion of desegregation. In addition, the District Court should evaluate whether or not the appropriate steps had been taken to ensure the effective operation of such a program (*Cooper v Aaron*, 1958, para. 4). Ultimately, the Court of Appeals made it clear that the constitutional rights of respondents are not to be sacrificed to the violence and disorder caused by the actions of state officials, and that depriving Negro children of their constitutional right is prohibited and does not constitute law and order. Furthermore, the interpretation of the 14th amendment forbids states to use their governmental powers to oppress children on racial grounds from attending schools where states participate in any arrangement, management, funds, or property. Even so, the Arkansas state authorities and public school system of Little Rock, Arkansas took two and one-half years to develop a

plan for desegregation. All Little Rock public schools were integrated in 1972, 18 years after *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) *and Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* (1955) and just 46 years ago. As for the Little Rock Nine, Ernest Green was the only participant of the Little Rock Nine to graduate from Central High. The other eight students completed their education at other schools or via other educational opportunities.

## Conclusion

Try to imagine being violently abducted from your home and family, bound by massive chains that restricted your movement, and forced to board a cargo ship on a voyage to an unknown land. You are stripped of your tribal name, language, culture, and denied basic human rights, including educational opportunities. You are forced to speak an unknown tongue and adopt a foreign culture. You are considered and treated as someone's property, to be sold at will without regard to your humanity. Your worth is based upon your strength and ability to reproduce. Your purpose is to add wealth to the pockets of your white owners. This strange and foreign place is America, where the legal system was created and sustained by white supremacy, and the atrocious historical ties to slavery that continue to oppress the lives and very essence of African Americans. Nevertheless, Black people emerged from slavery with a strong desire for a better life and equitable education. This desire propelled formerly enslaved Black people to seek out education for themselves and their children.

These Black people became leaders of their education and went about the business of establishing their schools and educational associations. Although there were whites who assisted with the development of universal education for Black people, Black people fought to maintain control of their schools. Self-determination was a cornerstone

value that underlay the education movement created and sustained by enslaved and freed Black people. Addressing the historical racial oppression within the Black Belt that continues to plague generation after generation of African Americans living in the rural South requires a critical race framework that identifies and addresses racist bureaucratic statutes and systemic inequalities.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

## Purpose of the Study

The historical landscape of the rural Southern Black Belt positioned African Americans as second-class citizens without civil rights (Beaulieu, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Falk et al., 1993; Goldfield, 1991; Lichter, 1989; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Pilgrim, 2000; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wilkerson, 2010). As a result, the lives of African American people were controlled by de jure segregation during the Jim Crow era, which occurred during the end of the Reconstruction period around the late 1870s and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s (Pilgrim, 2000). Jim Crow laws and norms were a series of anti-Black edicts positioning African Americans as an inferior class of persons barred from upward mobility. Under the rule of Jim Crow, African Americans were confined to employment as laborers and domestic servants to whites (Beaulieu, 1988; Dollard, 1988; Falk et al., 1993; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963; Iceland, 2013). Accordingly, Jim Crow, an American historical legacy, set the rural Southern Black Belt on a racially and culturally destructive course of development. This destructive course set the Black Belt apart from other regions of the United States (Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris, 2000; Beaulieu, 1988; Wimberley, 2010). Consequently, the Black Belt is a forgotten place occupied by invisible people (Lyson & Falk, 1993; Lichter, 1989).

This chapter is divided into four sections: the theoretical framework, methodology, data collection, and researcher's positionality. The first section, theoretical framework, begins with an exploration of the underpinnings of Critical Race Theory (CRT). I connect these underpinnings to Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and the historically

marginalized, racialized, and oppressed lived experiences of African Americans. The second section is a discussion of the qualitative methodology guiding this research exploration. A rationale for using qualitative phenomenological critical race methodology is presented. Data collection is described in the third section. This section provides information about the research participants who engaged in this phenomenological critical race study, a description of the research setting, details of the data collection methods, and a timeline of the research process. The last section accentuates my positionality as a member of the community in which this research exploration takes place.

## Theoretical Framework

I think and believe that the lives of African Americans have been oppressed and held hostage by white supremacy and racist systemic inequalities; therefore, I have chosen Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework to explore the lives of African Americans who lived in the rural Southern Black Belt during the Jim Crow era. Whiteness is analyzed, the historical roots of CRT are explored, a general outline of a corrupt judicial system is presented, and CRT tenets are identified to support why CRT is the appropriate theoretical framework for this study.

Whiteness is best understood in relation to non-white groups. According to Molina (2014), white is a hierarchical category with specific rankings, "Anglo-Saxons in the first position; Celts, Slavs, Jews, and Mediterranean below Anglo-Saxons; and Mexicans, Indians, and Black people" on the bottom of the hierarchical ladder (p. 26). Thus, dominant racial scripts connect "racialized groups" (p. 6) across time and space, imposing prescribed socialization principles upon groups. The hidden power of these

racial scripts is involved each time racial scripts are enforced upon groups and or individuals.

Take, for example, the government and military force that committed genocide against the Indigenous people (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014), deported Mexicans (Molina, 2014), and enslaved Africans and imprisoned African Americans (Alexander, 2012). Correspondingly, whiteness is an ideology grounded in a force of assimilation, capitalism, and, I dare say, cultural homogeneity (Alexander, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; DiAngelo, 2011; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Molina, 2014). Consequently, America's foundation is built on the annihilation and oppression of non-white people via bureaucratic power that creates and sustains whiteness principles and white culture. As a result, the lives of people of color are contained within the structure of white privilege suppressing equality and equity (Alexander, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2006, 2012, 2014; DiAngelo, 2011; McLaren, 2000). I conclude, therefore, that whiteness and white privilege equate to mass destruction of non-white people. I think that the hegemony of bureaucratic institutions is maintained by white people who participate in racial dominance. It is out of these denied injustices and violations or stalled deliverances of civil rights committed by the judicial system that Critical Race Theory emerged (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The historical roots of CRT are connected to Critical Legal Studies (CLS) (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). It has been recorded that CLS emerged from The Common Law in 1881 by Oliver Wendell Holmes (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Oliver Wendell Holmes, a legal realist, served as an American jurist of

the United States Supreme Court from 1902 to 1932. He espoused that judicial decisions were not determined by critical evaluation of facts through an equitable system of justice. Instead, judicial decisions were determined based on instinctive subjective political, economic, social, and racial contexts that often produce inconsistent results because these results were based on the predilections of the presiding judge or judges. This common-law arbitration was in direct opposition to the principles of Legal Realism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Legal Realism re-emerged during the era of the Civil Rights Movement, but with a different name, Critical Legal Studies (CLS) (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Scholars of CLS argued for societal and political change to combat the unequal power and supremacy of white males. Furthermore, CLS accused the judicial system of creating and sustaining white supremacy and systemic racism by maliciously covering up injustices through capricious judgments. As a result of this accusation, CRT was advanced by critical legal scholars, such as Derek Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberle Crenshaw, who not only identified brutal and inhuman systemic inequalities, but also fought to dismantle inequitable distribution of power, privilege, and resources. Correspondingly, the white backlash against the 1950s and 1960s progressive racial reforms produced duplicitous legal actions maintaining white supremacy and racial oppression (Patterson, 2004; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). This white backlash meant that legal scholars had an even more arduous task of proving and combating illicit racial prejudices and injustices (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Interestingly, Supreme Court decisions, laws, and treaties were

the structural forces that scripted race; thus, enforcing institutional racism and the denial of human rights.

For instance, the Supreme Court case *Dred Scott v Sandford* (1857), denied full birthright privileges to free Black people born in the United States. Furthermore, the ruling of Supreme Court cases *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896), *Watson v City of Memphis* (1963), and *Palmer v Thompson* (1971) upheld racial segregation by maintaining the doctrine of separate but equal. Moreover, African Americans were excluded from serving as jurors in the Supreme Court Case, *Swain v Alabama* (1965). Additionally, *Jane Doe v the State of Louisiana* (1985) reinforced racist ideology by upholding the "one-drop" rule that determined an individual's sociopolitical constructed racial identity. The one-drop rule was a legal principal created in the United States during the 19th century to establish racial classification (Hollinger, 2005; Khanna, 2010; Saperstein & Penner, 2012; Saperstein, Penner, & Light, 2013). Subsequently, CRT disrupts the dominant narrative of white supremacy and racism and provides a space for the lived experiences, narratives, and knowledge of racially oppressed and marginalized groups to be acknowledged and empowered (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), CRT is an activist framework in that it attempts to identify, understand, and change systemic inequalities.

CRT emerged from the Civil Rights Movement to challenge white liberal claims of neutrality and color blindness concerning the law (Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Moreover, CRT posits that race and racism are always prevalent in everyday life in the United States, influence all social interactions, and dominate the research process (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998;

Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, CRT asserts that neutrality and color blindness sustain structural inequalities and racism (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This proclamation is countered by the five critical tenets of CRT that are designed not only to confront oppressive systemic agencies that sustain racist structures, but also to eradicate racial inequalities and discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

These five critical tenets to CRT identify racism, call out white privilege, and acknowledge the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities as a source of power and strength that combat colonialized research (Collins, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). First, racism is the natural order of business governing power structures and systems of human interactions that go unacknowledged or are blatantly denied making it virtually impossible to confront. Second, whites only involve themselves in acknowledging and opposing racism if doing so benefits their lives. This self-serving motive is termed interest convergence. Third, race is a sociopolitical construct (Haney-Lopez, 1994), not an objective or scientific trait. Thus, race is fluid and not a fixed identity or personal identifier. Fourth, minoritized groups are racialized according to political, economic, and social contexts. Finally, the voices of oppressed people of color are considered powerful resources for combating systems of racism and inequalities. It is because CRT seeks to address and combat racism that CRT is an appropriate framework to explore the lives of African Americans who resided in the Black Belt, a land and region where African American families were born, reared, and for some died, and experienced racial violence and oppression during the Jim Crow era (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Therefore, it is the fourth and fifth tenets of CRT, as mentioned above, in conjunction with Phenomenological (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016) Critical Race Methodology (CRM) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) that will be used as analytic categories to analysis data.

## Phenomenology Research

Phenomenological research is a form of qualitative research that explores a phenomenon of interest that holds a collective meaning for several participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). In other words, a phenomenological approach illuminates the phenomenon of research interest through the personal perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of participants. Additionally, phenomenology research allows the researcher to center the study around the lived experiences of individuals in relation to a particular phenomenon within a single concept or a specific setting. The phenomenon of this study is the Jim Crow era.

Phenomenology research is an excellent companion to CRT at providing a space to explore the lived experiences of my African American elders who survived the Jim Crow era while residing in the rural Southern Black Belt because phenomenological research aims to highlight what an experience means to individuals through the exploration of narratives and perceptions. Additionally, CRT provides a space for the lived experiences, stories, and experiential knowledge of my African American elders who experienced life in the rural Black Belt during the Jim Crow era. Moreover, CRT views the oppressive educational experiences and journeys of racialized and marginalized individuals as sources of knowledge and strength that challenge colonialized research

(Collins, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Therefore, let us use Phenomenological (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016) Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) to explore the lived experiences and educational journeys of African Americans who survived the Jim Crow era as residents of a small rural Southern community located in the Black Belt, Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas.

G. W. F. Hegel made phenomenology famous in 1807 when he wrote Phenomenology of Spirit (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). However, it is Edmund Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology that guides this study. Husserl believed that the human experience must be critically considered if science desired to enable humanity to shape its destiny. This critical consideration of the human experience requires a two-prong approach.

First, phenomenology attempts to determine the meaning of lived experiences through lifeworlds (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). These lifeworlds are defined by van Manen (2016) as, "the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations" (p. 101). Individuals possess four lifeworlds. The lived space or the world in which people find themselves is the first lifeworld. This lived space includes an individual's culture and social space. The second lifeworld is lived body, which includes the physical presence of an individual, such as an individual's fluid personal identity markers (e.g., race, sex, and gender). The third lifeworld, lived other, is concerned with relations to other people or social networks and social class. The fourth lifeworld is lived time or life cycle, which is fashioned by historical, political, and cultural paradigms. Although multiple contexts shape lived time, individuals' life cycles are influenced by current and future experiences and their perceptions of these experiences. These

lifeworlds are homologous to the fourth and fifth tenets of CRT that assert that minoritized groups are racialized according to political, economic, and social contexts and that the voices of people of color are considered powerful resources for combating systems of racism.

The second phenomenological approach to exploring and understanding lived experiences is to provide a robust representation of these four lived worlds (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). This robust representation is created from two forms of descriptions, textual and structural, and is produced from critical intentionality and reflection. Textual descriptions describe an experience and the sensations that capture the meaning of an experience; whereas, structural descriptions describe the setting or how the experience of a phenomenon came to be what it is for participants. Producing textual and structural descriptions requires intentionality and reflection. Intentionality is concerned with determining if meaning is embedded within an explanation or if meaning is a product of an experience. Whereas, reflection is an analytical tool used to synthesize information to arrive at a level of comprehension.

Consequently, a phenomenological approach requires a return to an experience and reflective structure analysis to capture the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). However, phenomenology is not an empirical science seeking to prove anything or quantify an outcome. Instead, it is an exploration of individuals' lifeworlds. Thus, data analysis for this study involves embarking on a journey back in time as participants describe their life experiences. However, before taking this adventure, it is important to underscore three principal phenomenological elements: researcher's inquiry and

presuppositions, framing phenomenological research questions, and phenomenological methods of analysis.

Phenomenological research posits that a researcher cannot and should not pretend to be detached from her presuppositions (Hammersley, 2000). All researchers hold preconceived, implicit, and even explicit thoughts and beliefs about individuals, groups, and phenomena (Mouton & Marais, 1990). Furthermore, according to Moustakas (1994), it is the "researchers' excitement and curiosity that inspire the research" (p. 104). Thus, the researcher's inquiry is guided and developed out of the researcher's interest in a specific phenomenon, and how individuals experienced the phenomenon. As a result, this study is the product of my intimate connection to the rural Southern Black Belt. I reiterate, I decided to return to my hometown of Brinkley, Arkansas to explore the lived experiences of my African American elders who survived the Jim Crow Era because who I am now, a multiethnic heterosexual African American woman who was influenced and shaped by this community in which I was raised. Hence, research questions must be intentional and reflective to capture the essence of my elders' lived experiences.

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research questions must have five essential characteristics. These characteristics include:

> seeking to reveal the full essences and meanings of human experience; seeking to uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative factors in behavior and experience; engaging the whole self of the research participant, and sustaining personal and passionate involvement; not seeking to predict or to determine causal relationships; and illuminating through careful, comprehensive descriptions, vivid and accurate renderings of experiences, rather than measurements, ratings, or scores. (p. 105)

That being so, the research questions guiding this study are:

What experiences have you had with Jim Crow, legal segregation, as an African American residing in Brinkley, Arkansas - the rural Southern Black Belt?

How or in what ways did your experiences with Jim Crow affect your education?

How or in what ways did your experience with Jim Crow affect your life?

As for analyzing research questions, phenomenological methods of analysis include five essential steps. The first step of phenomenological methods of analysis includes reading straight through the initial interview transcripts. The second step is a re-read of the initial interview transcripts to delineate each time meaning is perceived within the participant's story. Once meaning has been determined, the third step is to eliminate redundancies and clarify or elaborate on identified meanings. While reflecting on meanings, the fourth step is to create the essence of the experience by asking what do the meanings of the experience reveal. Finally, textual and structural descriptions of the experiences are synthesized and integrated into insightful and robust representations of participants' lived experiences. Ultimately, a phenomenological analysis is concerned with the process of facilitating knowledge. This knowledge process consists of four steps: epoche, transcendental phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis.

The epoche process requires casting aside preconceived notions about an event or situation; in other words, taking a fresh look or a naïve viewpoint of an experience. The transcendental phenomenological reduction is the second step in the knowledge process. The transcendental phenomenological reduction is the describing of an experience of an event in textual language. The task is to look at and describe the qualities of an event numerous times to produce a robust understanding of the phenomenon with the ultimate aim of adding to one's knowledge of the phenomenon. The third step, imaginative

variation, provides structural descriptions of lived experiences by taking into account the textual descriptions of the phenomenon to produce divergent perspectives. In other words, exploring how the experience of a phenomenon came to be what it is for participants. The final step in the phenomenological research knowledge method is synthesis. Synthesis involves integrating the textural and structural descriptions into a whole that captures the essences of the experience of the stated phenomenon. The significance of phenomenological research is to compel us to reflect, transform, and capture participants' lived experiences with a specific phenomenon. As previously stated, because phenomenology aims to highlight what an experience means to individuals through the exploration of narratives, it is an excellent companion to CRT. CRT provides the space to explore the lived experiences of my African American elders who survived the Jim Crow era while residing in the rural Southern Black Belt.

## Research Setting

This study takes place in Brinkley, Arkansas, a small rural Southern community located in the Black Belt, Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas. The meaning of a place is intimately connected to the life of a community, influences the fluid identities of community residents, and helps to elucidate the historical essences of a community (Hutchison, 2004; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2012; Ratcliff et al., 2016). Therefore, focusing on place aids in understanding the environs that create and sustain a community, the "Black Belt."

### Monroe County, Arkansas

Monroe County, Arkansas, was established November 2, 1829, and named after James Monroe the fifth president of the United States ("Monroe County, Arkansas,"

2019). Moreover, the county is located in the southeast region of the state of Arkansas and is accessible via Interstate 40 (Worldatlas.com) (Figure 3.1). Additionally, the county government of Monroe is located in the county seat of Clarendon, Arkansas (Figure 3.2).

*Figure 3.1:* Maps of Monroe County, Arkansas


*Figure 3.2:* Map of Monroe, County, Arkansas, County Seat


**Monroe County, Arkansas Population Data**

The population of Monroe County, Arkansas grew significantly between 1830 and 1920; however, the region experienced a steady population decline that started in

1930 (United States Census Office & Gannett, 1898). Consequently, between 1930 and 2010, the region's population decreased by 12,502 individuals (United States Census Bureau, 2010) (Table 3.1).

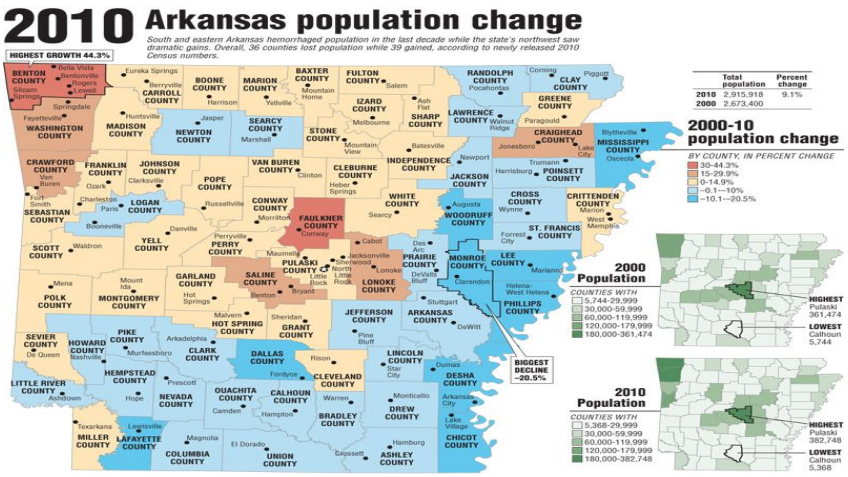
Table 3.1

*Historical Population of Monroe County*

| **1830** | **1840** | **1850** | **1860** | **1870** | **1880** | **1890** | **1900** | **1910** | **1920** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 461 | 936 | 2,049 | 5,657 | 8,336 | 9,574 | 15,336 | 16,816 | 19,907 | 21,601 |
| **1930** | **1940** | **1950** | **1960** | **1970** | **1980** | **1990** | **2000** | **2010** | |
| 20,651 | 21,133 | 19,540 | 17,327 | 15,657 | 14,052 | 11,333 | 10,254 | 8,149 | |

According to the United Census Bureau's 2010 total population data, 8,149 individuals lived in this region. Furthermore, the United States Census Bureau's 2016 population estimate as of July 1, 2016, was 7,169 individuals, a decrease of 980 individuals since the 2010 census (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Continuing, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette provides a useful map outlining Arkansas' population change (Figure 3.3).

*Figure 3.3:* Map Outlining Arkansas' Population Change



According to the 2010 Arkansas Census population change map, Monroe county experienced the most significant population decline, -20.5%, than any other Arkansas county. As for the population demographics, African Americans comprised 40.9% of the population, and Caucasian comprised 56.3% of the population (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

**Monroe County, Arkansas Poverty and Education**

The 2015 estimated median household income for Monroe County, Arkansas was $27,647 (United States Census Bureau, 2010-2014). Additionally, thirty-three percent of the population was living below poverty. Furthermore, seventy-seven percent of the adult population had completed high school or higher, and 12.1% had attained a Bachelor degree or higher (United States Census Bureau, 2011-2015).

**Brinkley, Arkansas**

The town of Brinkley is one of five major cities in Monroe, County (Mitchell, 2016). Although Brinkley has the largest population of the five cities, its current estimated population of 2,798 people classifies Brinkley as a rural town (United States Census Bureau, 2016). To provide geographical context, Brinkley is positioned 73 miles west of Memphis, Tennessee and 68 miles east of Little Rock, Arkansas (MapQuest, n.d.). Memphis, Tennessee and Little Rock, Arkansas are the two largest and closest urban cities located within a 75-mile radius of Brinkley, Arkansas. Moreover, to access the small Southern rural town of Brinkley, one would travel Interstate 40 and take exit 216. In addition to its unique location, Brinkley has a peculiar history with regard to its former name.

Brinkley was known by its nickname "Rustic Skillet or Lick Skillet" until 1872 when it became known and established as a railroad town (Dennis, 2016). This nickname originated from an old folktale concerning the railroad crew. The story goes something like this, once the crew had finished their work, they settled down for a bit to eat and retired for the evening only after the last skillet was licked (Dennis, 2016). Due to the construction of the railway lines between Memphis, Tennessee and Little Rock, Arkansas, the town of Brinkley was platted between 1869 and 1870. It was the completion of the railway that boosted the town of Brinkley as an export hub of lumber. Historically, Brinkley was considered the transportation and agricultural center of the region (Dennis, 2016). Due to this industrial popularity, the population of Brinkley increased over the next 70 years, 1990-1950 (Table 3.2)

Table 3.2

*Brinkley, Arkansas Historical Populations Trends*

**Historical Population of Brinkley, Arkansas as per the U.S. Census**

| **Census** | **Population** | **%±** |
|---|---|---|
| 1880 | 327 | |
| 1890 | 1,510 | 362% |
| 1900 | 1,648 | 9% |
| 1910 | 1,740 | 6% |
| 1920 | 2,714 | 56% |
| 1930 | 3,046 | 12% |
| 1940 | 3,409 | 12% |
| 1950 | 4,173 | 22% |
| 1960 | 4,636 | 11% |
| 1970 | 5,275 | 14% |
| 1980 | 4,909 | -7% |
| 1990 | 4,232 | -14% |
| 2000 | 3,940 | -7% |
| 2010 | 3,188 | -19% |
| **Est. 2016** | 2,798 | -12% |

Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2014 Retrieved December 9, 2017

**Population Estimates U. S. Census Bureau**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **2011** | 3152 | -1% |
| **2012** | 3063 | -3% |
| **2013** | 2995 | -2% |
| **2014** | 2972 | -.08% |
| **2015** | 2896 | -3% |
| **2016** | 2798 | -3% |

U. S. Census Bureau, Population Division

According to the 2016 United States Census population estimates, the population of Brinkley was 2,798. The 2010 United States Census total population was 3,188. Between 2010 and 2016, the region experienced a decrease in population of 390 individuals. Interestingly, according to the Annual Estimates of Resident Population for Incorporated places, the population of Brinkley has been on the decline since the 1980s.

**Brinkley, Arkansas Population Demographics**

African Americans comprised 51.6% of the population, and Caucasians comprised 45.4% of the population (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Additionally, fifty-seven percent of the population was 18-64 years of age. Furthermore, the 2016 estimated median household income was $23,112. Correspondingly, the poverty level was 85.1% greater than the Arkansas average and 132.8% greater than the National average.

**Brinkley, Arkansas Economy**

It is estimated that 1,160 people are employed in Brinkley, Arkansas either in retail trade, food services, or manufacturing (Data USA: Brinkley, AR, 2019). The major employer in Brinkley is the local specialty rice plant, Riviana (Specialty Rice, Inc., 2017). The Riviana plant primarily harvests and packages uncooked rice. This organization has been in business for over 23 years, employs about 50 people, and generates $24.5 million in annual revenues. The Riviana organization processes, markets, and distributes household rice and pasta products, for example, Minute Rice, Success, Creamette, and Ronzoni (Figures 3.4 and 3.5).

*Figure 3.4:* Riviana Rice Plant

*Figure 3.5:* Industrial Area – Rice Plant

Picture taken by DiAnna Washington on July 9, 2017

Regarding retail employment opportunities, the retail sector of Brinkley consists of several fast food options and multiple gas stations, for example, KFC, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Waffle House, Subway, and Sonic. Thus, hungry visitors arriving in the town of Brinkley can choose from any one of the local food chains or try some good ole southern fried fish or tasty barbeque. If gasoline is needed, visitors can top off their gas tanks at one of the many gas station mini-food marts including Exxon, Shell, Citgo, Flash Market, K Stop, Pumps, or Phillips 66. As for shopping, visitors should not expect much from the town. Visitors have a choice between Family Dollar, Dollar General, and Fred's Pharmacy. The same goes if visitors need to buy groceries. Kroger is the only major grocery chain located in Brinkley. Alternatively, if you feel up to an adventure back in time, visit the local Corner Grocery store (Figure 3.6), however, do not expect the store to offer much variety.

*Figure 3.6:* Corner Grocery Store

Picture taken by DiAnna Washington, July 9, 2017

After visitors have completed their shopping, grabbed a bite to eat, and filled up their gas tanks, they are invited to adventure to downtown Brinkley (Figure 3.7) where they can buy stamps, mail a letter at the local Post Office, or visit the town's City Hall and police station. Additionally, if visitors are interested in the local news or learning about the town's history, they could buy the local newspaper, Monroe County Herald, formerly knows as the Brinkley Argus or visit the Central Delta Depot Museum.

*Figure 3.7:* Downtown Brinkley, Arkansas

Pictures taken by DiAnna Washington on July 9, 2017

## Pilot Study

As previously stated, a phenomenological study is guided by and developed from the researcher's interest in a specific phenomenon and how individuals experience the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). Thus, the initial step is to identify a phenomenon and then determine who might have experienced the phenomenon. For this study, the phenomenon is the Jim Crow era, and the participants are African Americans, my elders, who reside in the rural Southern Black Belt, more specifically, Brinkley, Arkansas, Monroe County. An essential step to conducting a phenomenological research study is to determine if there exists a specific phenomenon within a specific setting to explore. Thus, I registered for two independent study courses during the spring 2017 term to determine the possibility of exploring the lived experiences and educational journeys of elderly African Americans about the phenomenon of growing up and living in a small rural Southern community located in the Black Belt, Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas during the Jim Crow era. These independent study courses resulted in a pilot study.

The pilot study was titled, An exploration of the lived experiences and educational journeys of African Americans who lived through Jim Crow in Brinkley, Arkansas; IRB number 1611061218A001 with an approval date of April 3, 2017. An initial participant was identified and selected with the help of my mother, who served as my community informant and as a research participant. Additional participants were selected using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where current participants are asked to recommend new research participants from among their acquaintances (Creswell, 2013). That being so, each participant was asked to recommend one or two additional acquaintances to participate in the study until five participants had been recruited. I then contacted potential participants either by phone or by home visits. All participants who agreed to participate in the study were contacted to discuss the extent and duration of the study.

Additionally, all participants received a study information sheet. The information sheet emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and provided participants with information regarding the benefits and risks associated with participating in the study. Equally, participants were informed of confidentiality, and participants and the researcher signed consent letters.

The five participants who agreed to participate in the pilot study included three women and two men. The average age of these five participants was 78 years of age. In addition, all participants self-identified as either Black, African American, or Negro. Of the five participants, three participants were born and reared in Brinkley, Arkansas, a fourth participant moved to Brinkley, Arkansas as a young child at the age of five or six and has lived in Brinkley for the past 80 years of her life, and the fifth participant was

born and reared in Moro, Arkansas, which is located 16 miles south of Brinkley, Arkansas via Highway 49. The occupations of these five participants included one retired teacher, two retired military personnel, and two homemakers. While sharing their life stories, each participant expressed experiencing the effects of racial segregation on their daily lives and educational opportunities. Thus, preliminary interviews with these five participants supported further exploration of their lived experiences. Therefore, analysis of these interviews will be incorporated into dissertation data in conjunction with new data that is to be collected from additional participants who meet selection criteria. One additional participant was identified and selected via snowball sampling.

## Data Collection

I used semi-structured interviews to record and explore the educational journeys and lived experiences of African Americans living in the Black Belt region of rural Southern America. To a lesser extent, I relied on observations of participants' non-verbal cues to capture emotional reactions to being subjected to Jim Crow regulations. This study also included a review of historical artifacts to help illustrate elements of the political and historical contexts of the Black Belt. Using these three different approaches, interviews, observations, and artifacts, to gathering qualitative data provided for triangulation of findings. Triangulation involved the use of multiple data sources to investigate research questions (Cohen & Crabtree. 2006).

### Individual Interviews

Six elderly African Americans verbally agreed to be interviewed. In addition, participants agreed to allow the research to use their given names. These six participants were interviewed to explore their experiences and perceptions about the phenomenon of

living in a small southern rural community in the Delta region of the United States during the Jim Crow era. Furthermore, these participants were interviewed to conceive how their experiences may have influenced their educational journeys. Participants were asked to share personal stories about their lives and educational experiences and how they coped with life in their community. Participants were asked to commit to two or three semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted at different points of time and extended up to 90 minutes each.

To ensure prolonged engagement, a technique of trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this study spanned twelve months from the initial start of April 2017. Furthermore, all interviews were audiotaped, and a preliminary set of interview questions was used to focus each interview (Creswell, 2013). However, because this study is a phenomenological study to explore the educational journeys and lived experiences of African Americans who lived through the Jim Crow era, as residents of a small rural Southern community located in Arkansas, interviews were guided by each participant's sharing information about his or her lived experiences. Thus, supplemental questions surfaced based on participants shared experiences.

## Research Process

This study is divided into four specific phases to assist with organizing and staying on task. Each phase is assigned a timeframe, specific activities, and related data collection processes. The four specific phases to this research study are outlined in the timeline provided in Figure 3.8. During the initial recruitment stage, participants were informed of the data collection methods and made aware that the study may be time-consuming.

*Figure 3.8:* Research Process and Timeline

| **Phase I: Orientation to Community and Research Study** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Duration** | **Activity** | **Data Collection** |
| On-going | Building rapport and trust / recruit participants | Visit with participants |
| 1 month | Introduce Study | Consent letters |
| | **Description** | |
| Phase I of the research process is designed to build rapport and trust with community members and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the context of the community. Furthermore, this phase involves introducing the study and recruiting participants. Consent letters will be collected. | | |
| **Phase II: Exploration of Research Study** | | |
| **Duration** | **Activity** | **Data Collection** |
| Up to 5 months | Conduct individual interviews | Audiotape, reflective notes |
| | Analyze interviews | Transcription/member checking |
| | **Description** | |
| Phase II will last up to five months during which individual interviews will be conducted. Interviews will be transcribed within 24 or 48 hours. Efforts will be made not to schedule additional interviews until transcriptions are completed. For clarification and correction, participants will be asked to review transcriptions. | | |
| **Phase III: Trustworthiness** | | |
| **Time Frame** | **Research Activity** | **Data Collection** |
| 1 month | Share data and interpretation of data with participants | Audiotapes/transcriptions/member checking/triangulation of all data |
| 2 months | Data Analysis | |
| | **Description** | |
| Trustworthiness is the reliability and validity of qualitative research. Although I will conduct member checking throughout the research study, I plan to dedicate one month to triangulate all data and verify participants' comments by connecting historical artifacts. | | |
| **Phase IV: Data Analysis** | | |
| **Duration** | **Activity** | **Data Collection** |
| 3 months | Exit interviews | Thank you to participants |
| | Data Analysis continue | Analyze transcripts |
| | Start writing dissertation | Themes/codes |
| | **Description** | |
| This is the final phase in the research study. I will thank each participant for his or her participation and assistance. I will continue with data analysis and start writing my dissertation. | | |

## Data Analysis

Preliminary data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process. According to Grbich (2013, preliminary analysis allows for emerging themes and issues to be identified to guide additional data collection. Preliminary data analysis consisted of listening to audiotapes, and reading and reexamining transcriptions of interviews. Data was analyzed by becoming familiar with the data collected, developing and categorizing broad themes, and creating textual and structural descriptions. After conducting, analyzing, and member checking all data sources, themes and descriptions were narrowed as they related to the primary purpose of the research study, which is an exploration of the experiences of African Americans living in the rural Southern Black Belt during the Jim Crow era. Although a thematic analytic method assisted with organizing and describing the data in robust details, the final data analysis will not be the typical colonialized research we as African Americans educators are forced to endure. Instead, data analysis will produce a journey in which readers will be asked to embark. As mentioned earlier, CRT and CRM use the voices of oppressed people of color as powerful resources of knowledge and strength to challenge colonialized research (Collins, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Additionally, phenomenological critical race methodology illuminates the phenomenon of research interest through the personal perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). Thus, the employment of Critical Race Methodology provides the space to explore the lived experience of my African American elders who survived the Jim Crow era while residing in the rural Southern Black Belt.

Because this study focuses on the racial injustices, white supremacy, and oppression of African Americans and centers the lived experiences of African Americans in the Southern rural Black Belt during the Jim Crow era, readers will be asked to take a journey back in time when African Americans had no civil rights and their lives were controlled by the whims of white individuals who considered Black people as disposable property. This journey will explore the lifeworlds (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016) of each participant by providing robust representations in story form that capture the essences of the lived experiences of my African American elders who survived the Jim Crow era while residing in the rural Southern Black Belt.

## Researcher's Positionality

I am a multiethnic heterosexual African American woman reared in the small, rural working-class community in which I conducted this research. Consequently, as who I am now has been influenced and shaped by this community in which I was raised, I approach my research keenly aware that my identity impacted my research. Additionally, I acknowledge that as a doctoral student and education researcher, I am positioned as the privileged other. Thus, I used Milner's (2007) positionality framework to unpack and trouble my own identity and positionality as I sought to explore the lived experiences and educational journeys of my African American elders who survived the Jim Crow era as residents of a small rural Southern community located in the Black Belt, Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas.

Milner (2007) cautions researchers about the seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers of not paying close attention to one's own and others' racialized and cultural systems of knowing and being. In addition, Milner's racial and cultural positionality

framework provided vital elements that were essential to unpacking and situating my racial and cultural knowledge about my community, my elders, and myself. These key factors included, "researching self," "researching the self in relations to others," "engaged reflection and representation," and "shifting from self to system" (p. 395).

Researching self requires the researcher to engage in critical self-reflection of one's values and beliefs about their race, ethnicity, and cultural heritage. Milner (2007) provided several questions to help researchers engage in critical self-reflection. For example, "What is my racial and cultural heritage? How do I know?" "What is the historical landscape of my racial and cultural identity and heritage? How do I know?" (p. 395)? The point of asking these questions is to evoke explicit, hidden, or unexpected and unresolved racial and cultural conflicts, which may have an influence on all aspects of the research study. Self-reflection is not a linear process; it requires time and patience.

Researching self in relation to others situates the researcher, me, within the center of the research community. Researching self required an evaluation of who I am in relation to the community and participants within the community. This feature supports the multiple and fluid identities, positions, and roles all people possess. Furthermore, this feature requires the negotiation of research interest, power positions, and assumed truths and or realities (Milner, 2007). To assist with researching self, I used two of Smith's (1999) decolonizing methodologies: claiming and connecting. Claiming and connecting required researching, acknowledging, and claiming my personal history as it related to society, my community, and my elders. Once more, Milner (2007) provided several questions to guide the researcher in researching the self in relation to others. For instance, "What are the cultural and racial heritage and the historical landscape of the participants

in the study? How do I know? How do I negotiate and balance my interest and research agenda with those of my research participants, which may be inconsistent with or diverge from mine?" (p. 395)

The third feature of Milner's racial and cultural position, engage reflection and representation, requires the researcher and the participants to collectively engaged in reflecting on what is happening in the research, within the community, and the impact of race and culture. Milner stresses that the critical element of this feature is "representation and shared perspectives" (p. 396). I utilized member checking to establish data credibility. To ensure that comprehension and accurate representation of participants' responses were appropriately recorded, participants were provided copies of their transcripts and asked to review data for accuracy (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Together, we reflected on the stories being told and evaluated the historical racial and cultural landscape of Brinkley.

The last feature, shifting from self to system, alters the research process from an individualistic perspective to systemic contexts by incorporating issues of political, social, and economic concerns. Milner (2007) encourages researchers to ask, "Wwhat is the contextual nature of race, racism, and culture in this study? What is known socially, institutionally, and historically about the community and people understudy? How do I know?" (p. 397). Patel (2015) cautions that "how we frame a research problem and its context is pivotal to understanding how it has already been understood, perhaps misunderstood, and what stances are fruitful for further understanding it" (p. 59). Thus, throughout each phase of this research, I "paused" (Patel, 2015) and will ask readers to

pause not only to feel and to think about my elders' life histories but also to honor their survival and courageous fight against Jim Crow.

## Conclusion

This study sought to explore the experiences of my African American elders about the phenomenon of growing up and living in a small Southern rural community in the Delta region of the United States during the Jim Crow era, and how their experiences may have influenced their lives and educational experiences. By examining the narratives of African Americans who survived the Jim Crow era while residing in the rural Southern Black Belt, researchers, educators, and all interested parties might gain new knowledge concerning the systemic educational inequalities and the lived experiences and educational journeys of African Americans. In addition, this new knowledge may assist researchers and educators with identifying systemic barriers to equitable education opportunities, and with creating equitable education models to address historically discriminatory education policies that excluded African Americans from equitable educational opportunities. Concluding, this chapter provided readers with information about the theoretical and epistemology framework of this study. Additional information provided in this chapter included general information about research participants, research setting, data collection process and analysis, and researcher's positionality.

# CHAPTER FOUR: VOICES OF MY ELDERS

## Critical Research Not Colonialized Research

Conducting critical research about a historically marginalized community and its members requires commitment, dedication, flexibility, and brutal honesty. The research on historically marginalized individuals and communities, more specially Black people, has dehumanized and racialized Black individuals as "subjects" of interest, and classified and reclassified Black beings as non-humans in order to make a profit all in the name of colonialized scientific research (Alexander, 2012; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Fanon, 1963; Freire, 2000; Molina, 2014; Smith, 1999).

Moreover, colonialized research attempts to eliminate the lived experiences, the culture, and the very existence of people and communities of color. According to Smith (1999):

> research is highly institutionalized through disciplines and fields of knowledge, through communities and interest groups of scholars, and through the academy. Research is also an integral part of political structures: governments fund research directly and indirectly through tertiary education, national science organizations, development programmes, and policies. All of these research activities are carried out by people who in some form or another have been trained and socialized into ways of thinking, of defining and of making sense of the known and unknown. (p. 124)

Conversely, critical research disrupts and dismantles the colonialized research process, including the writing and analysis of data. Furthermore, critical research is fundamentally unapologetic and requires the pursuit of knowledge and truth and critical transformation of colonialized pedagogy (Boggs & Kurashige, 2012; Fanon, 1963). Meaning, as a researcher, I have to do more than extract information, colonialize results, and generically present my findings (Freire, 2000; Patel, 2015; Smith, 1999).

Subsequently, this is an unapologetic phenomenological critical race exploration of the lived experiences and educational journeys of my elders who survived Jim Crow, while living in the Black Belt region of rural southern Monroe County, Arkansas. The region from which these stories originate is critical to understanding the struggles of Black Americans as they fought for survival under Jim Crow. This region is home to my elders whose ancestry includes enslavement, physical violence, denied rights, segregation, and emancipation. These stories are about the lives and lived experiences of six of my Brown and Black hue American elders whose ancestry was born out of slavery and delivered into the Jim Crow era. I have chosen to stay true to the dialect of my Southern roots and the authentic voices of my elders. Hence, the life stories you are about to read are genuine reflections without linguistic whitewashing to adhere to majoritarian white American grammar. Additionally, the voices of my elders serve as the unit of analysis and are in a position of authority above the voice of the researcher, me.

My voice is presented as reflections and is positioned after each section. To delineate my voice from my elders' voices, I have chosen to present my reflections in italic font and poetic freestyle writing. In addition, I use Milner's positionality framework to unpack my reflections. My conversations with my elders explored three phenomenology research inquiries.

R1. What experiences have you had with Jim Crow, legal segregation, as an African American residing in Brinkley, Arkansas - the rural Southern Black Belt?

R2. How or in what ways did your experiences with Jim Crow affect your education?

R3. How or in what ways did your experiences with Jim Crow affect your life?

As detailed in Chapter Three, I used Phenomenological research methods and the tenets of CRT to organize narratives and to create dramatic story-like vignettes reflecting my elders' lived worlds positioned as counter stories concerning their lived experiences and educational journeys as survivors of Jim Crow.

This chapter is organized into four sections. I begin with a brief overview of how I stared this journey and then present detail characterizations of my elders. The proceeding three sections contain the essence of my elders' life stories presented as vignettes using a phenomenological approach. As stated in chapter three, phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that explores a phenomenon of interest that holds a common meaning for several participants and seeks to illuminate the phenomenon through the personal perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of participants. These vignettes are organized in multiple headings and subheadings to help readers engage with my elders' experiences. Figure 4.1 summarizes headings and subheadings. Analysis of my elders' vignettes is outlined in chapter five and a discussion and conclusion are presented in chapter six.

*Figure 4.1*: Vignette Headings and Subheadings

| R1<br>Experiences with Jim Crow | R2<br>Jim Crow and education | R3<br>Jim Crow and life |
|---|---|---|
| **Heading 1**<br>Everyday Life | **Heading 1**<br>Education | **Heading 1**<br>What's Race Got To Do With It |
| **Subheadings**<br>Back Door Entrance<br>Wait Your Turn<br>Yo People Ain't Welcome Here<br>Right to Vote<br>Get Out of Town or Die<br>Call Me Mister<br>Our Best Customers Were White | **Subheadings**<br>I Am Not a mule<br>A Mixed Bag of Tricks<br>Hocus Pocus - Hodgepodge | **Subheadings**<br>My Racial Identity |
| **Heading 2**<br>Employment | **Heading 2**<br>Black Teachers and Parents Don't Mess Around | **Heading 2**<br>Nothing New Under the Sun |
| **Subheadings**<br>That DAMN Cotton<br>White Control<br>Know Your Worth<br>R E S P E C T | **Subheadings**<br>Should've, Could've, Would've<br>Separate and Unequal | **Subheadings**<br>Living Life |

Before embarking on the journey to reconnect with my community and my elders, I sought my mother's permission and guidance. Why? My mother has and will always be the beacon of light in my life. She taught me to know my worth and be aware of how other people will try to define and oppress me. She taught me that I have the power and ability to dream and achieve great things. I recall my mother telling me, Dinah - my family, nuclear and extended members alike, do not call me Di-An-na (Die Ann nah or Dee-Un nah; I am affectionately known as Dinah pronounced with a beautiful sunny, upbeat southern pronunciation (Dine nah) – you can conquer the world. I believed my mother then and I believe her now. Therefore, I called my mother at the start of my research journey to share with her my research interest and to seek her advice on how best to go about connecting with my elders. The first thing my mother said to me was,

you have to return to your community and gain your elders' trust. Thus, I returned to my community.

I dedicated eighteen months to visiting my community, talking with, and spending time with my elders. These eighteen months included the year I spent conducting multiple semi-structured conversations with six of my elders, four women and two men. All conversations were audio recorded, saved, and cataloged by date and participant's name. My unstructured and reactive thoughts and feelings were jotted down in my journal during, immediately following, or within 24 hours of speaking with my elders. As I read and re-read my elders' stories for clarification, simplification, and organization, I also reflected on and organized my unstructured and reactive thoughts and feelings concerning my elders' stories. After reflecting and organizing my thoughts and feelings, I connected my reflections to the structured vignettes of my six elders' life stories. What follows are poetic characterizations of my elders who permitted the use of their real names, and to include the name of our community, Brinkley, Arkansas.

**Wake Up!**
Brown skin girl it is time for you to shine.

Now that I have been BAPTIZED in the frigid reality of

COLONIALISM, SYSTEMIC RACISM, and social and political constructs of my identity

– RACIALIZED, SEXUALIZED, MARGINALIZED, and OPPRESSED
To assimilate into a world that despises my brown skin,

DENIES my HUMANITY and ultimately SEEKS to DESTROY my very existence – I can no longer sleep, or be silent.

NOW, I SPEAK!

LET MY VOICE BE HEARD – as I share the life stories of my elders.
LISTEN UP!

## These Are the People in My Neighborhood

### Mrs. Ruby Pighee

Mrs. Pighee (Ruby) is 5'2" and is slightly bent over due to a modest hump in her back. She wears a knee brace on her right leg, uses a walker for stable mobility, and wears a hat. Mrs. Pighee has short black hair and a light tan complexion with several freckles on her face. Behind her eyeglasses, Mrs. Pighee's eyes are narrow, covered by her top eyelids, and slanted downward. Her face is proud with high cheekbones, thin pink lips, and a short somewhat hooked, but not flat or wide nose supported by a narrow bridge that is straight and defined. Her face is almost wrinkle free except for a few lines around her eyes that are more pronounced when she expresses her emotions. For example, when Mrs. Pighee smiles or laughs the corner of her eyes and mouth produces fine lines that seem to add an extra layer of happiness to her expressions. The same is true of her facial features when she displays emotions of sadness or grief. Her face distorts to show an internal battle of discomfort. Multiple age lines appear on her forehead and large downward sloping lines appear around her mouth.

Mrs. Pighee is 89 years of age. She was born in Michigan in 1929 to Fred Wilson and Alenna (Stewart) Wilson. She is one of three children, two daughters and one son, born to Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. When Mrs. Pighee was 5 or 6 years of age, her mother passed away. Upon the death of her mother, Mrs. Pighee's father moved her and her sister to Brinkley, Arkansas, to live with her grandparents. Mrs. Pighee has resided in Brinkley, Arkansas. since the age of 5 or 6. Mrs. Pighee married at the age of 16. Her husband is deceased. They had twelve children, ten sons and two daughters; two of her children died very young, 8 months and 18 months and her oldest living son died

recently. Mrs. Pighee did not finish high school. Mrs. Pighee and I met several times during September 2016 through June 2018. During this period, we had five semi-structured interviews to discuss her life and education experiences. These interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 2 hours.

**Ms. Trudy Vance**

Ms. Trudy Vance is a dark chocolate woman about 5'6" inches tall. Her posture is confident, yet weary. Nowadays, Ms. Vance wears an array of diverse wigs depending on her mood. Her hair is mostly black except for the 2-inch horizontal band of gray hair that adorns her brow. Ms. Vance has no noticeable facial wrinkles except for when she physically uses her facial muscle to express a strong feeling or opinion. For example, one might notice the fine lines that seem to materialize individually and in slow motion, as if to reflect the subdued mood by which Ms. Vance talks about the hard life she experienced as a young female child growing up on the tail end of slavery. If you are perceptive, you might notice the delicate frown lines that shape Ms. Vance mouth when she speaks of picking and chopping cotton, or the deep and defined stress lines that abruptly appear in the corner of each eye when Ms. Vance speaks about her education struggles.

Ms. Vance's eyes are dark and piercing, yet clear and youthful. Occasionally, Ms. Vance will reach for her reading glasses when she needs additional optical assistance to read her mail. Her reading glasses rest comfortable on the edge of her nose, while being supported by slightly wide nostrils. Ms. Vance lips appear soft and full, but are smashed together when she appears to be fighting back emotions or trying to find the right words to express her emotions. Ms. Vance's entire body becomes expressive when she is moved

deeply by the detailed recollection of a past memory; her hands gesture in all directions; her feet and legs move perpetually; and her body fidgets in its sedentary position.

Ms. Vance is 72 years of age. She was born in 1946 to Mr. Neely Vance and Greathern (Word) Vance. She is one of eleven children born to Mr. and Mrs. Vance. She had five brothers and five sisters. Ms. Vance's dad was a bricklayer and minister, and her mom was a homemaker. Ms. Vance has lived her entire life in Brinkley, Arkansas. She never married, and has two children, a boy, and a girl. Ms. Vance's children are adults and live outside of Brinkley, Arkansas.

Ms. Vance was a secondary schoolteacher for 34 and a-half years. According to Ms. Vance, she never made any money. Her first check was about $500 for a whole month. When she retired as a schoolteacher, she was making almost $34,000. Ms. Vance is a college graduate. Not only was Ms. Vance my history teacher, she is my cousin. Her mother was my mother's great-aunt. Ms. Vance and I also met several times during December 2016 through June 2018. During this period, we had three semi-structured interviews to discuss her life and education experiences. These interviews lasted between 80 and 130 minutes.

**Mrs. Pearlie Mae Washington**

Mrs. Washington's skin is a rich ruddy hue with light tan and coco brown highlights. Her mane is long, wavy, and black with a few strands of gray and red mingled throughout. Mrs. Washington always styles her hair in two single parallel braids that are either tied at the end with small colorful cloth or pinned up with simple black hairpins. Her facial dimensions are proud and distinct. Her brow is chiefly positioned and smooth. Her eyes are dark, bold, piercing, and positioned deeply sunken within her eye sockets.

Her cheekbones are high and distinct. Her nose is pointed with strength and determination supported by a slightly broken bridge, yet symmetrical in contour. Her lips are decidedly thin and rosy. Her jawline is long and pronounced. Her neck is tall and strong.

Mrs. Washington is a 5'8" inch female with a slight bend in her stance. Mrs. Washington's face bears almost no wrinkles except for the expression lines around her mouth and on her forehead when she smiles or frowns. Her facial expressions hardly ever give notice to her emotional state of being. However, her voice reflections are accentuated when Mrs. Washington expresses her emotions. For examples, when Mrs. Washington speaks about her education experiences, her voice is deep and loud; when she speaks about sharecropping, her voice is shaky and mournful; and Mrs. Washington's voice is soft and smooth when she speaks of her family.

Mrs. Washington is 75 years of age. She was born in 1943 to Mr. Luther Wynn and Mary (Madden) Wynn. Her parents migrated from Indigenous territories of Alabama and Georgia. Mrs. Washington's parents were sharecroppers. She is the twelfth child of sixteen children born to Mr. and Mrs. Wynn. She had ten brothers and five sisters. Of the sixteen children born to Mr. and Mrs. Wynn, seven children are still living, four brothers, and three sisters. Mrs. Washington's entire childhood and young adult life was governed by the rules of sharecropping and Jim Crow. She has lived her entire life in Brinkley, Arkansas. Mrs. (Wynn) Washington married Mr. Washington when she was 17 years of age, and they had ten children, six daughters and four sons, of which two sets of twins were born. Of the ten children born to Mr. and Mrs. Washington, one is deceased. Mr.

Washington was a master carpenter while Mrs. Washington was a homemaker. Mrs. Washington did not finish high school.

Mrs. Washington is my mother, my role model, my beacon, my best friend, and my co-researcher. Although I have spent my entire life with Mrs. Washington, my mother, our research journey began the first day I decided to pursue my Ph.D. We engaged in numerous conversations and debates about what I would research, how I would conduct my research, why I should speak with and learn from my elders, and how I plan to give back to my family and community. According to my mother, I am blessed because my elders paved the way for me to have a voice, to have rights, to have opportunities; therefore, my life's legacy is to be a blessing to others by providing knowledge and opportunity for others in my community. We engaged in seven semi-structured interviews between May 2017 and August 2018.

Although my mother and I spent about 15 months talking about her life and education experiences for this research project, my time with my mother has expanded my entire life of 48 years. Thus, this relationship has and will influence my approach to this study, my experiences with my community and my elders, and how I organize and write about my exploration/research. Our conversations regarding my research, our elders, and our community is a never-ending story.

**Mrs. Samella White**

Mrs. White is a slender frame woman standing about 5'9" inches tall. Her skin is flawless and similar to the consistency of sealed wenge wood, but with silky smooth, rich and creamy dark chocolate tones. Her hair, which is salt and pepper color, is styled in a half-inch natural texture Afro. Her facial frame is narrow with distinct jawlines and

features. Her eyes, nose, and mouth are in perfect symmetry. Although her eyes give the appearance of being tired, Mrs. White is full of motion and energy. When speaking, Mrs. White's body becomes a communication tool in that her body engages in physical display of emotions. For example, when Mrs. White is excited or disgusted about a topic, situations, and or experiences, she walks about, rotates her head up and down and side-to-side, and engages in vast gesticulate.

Mrs. White is 89 years of age. She was born in 1929 to Mr. Samuel Frank Jackson and Mrs. Millie Bratcher Jackson. Her parents are from Cotton Plant, Arkansas, which is known by elders from the region as Dark Corner. Mrs. White is the fifth child of ten children, six boys and four girls, born to Mr. and Mrs. Jackson. Mrs. White lived in Brinkley until age 18. When her mother became ill, Mrs. White returned to Brinkley and has lived in Brinkley since. She expressed that she migrated to Chicago because she couldn't handle how Blacks were being treated in Brinkley. "I had to get out of here."

Mrs. White was married twice; both husbands are deceased. She has three grown children, two girls ages 72 and 70, and one son age 57. Mrs. White is a high school graduate. In addition, she attended college for a number of years, but did not graduate from college. She worked for the Chicago Board of Education. Mrs. White and I also met several times during January 2017 through June 2018. During this period, we had three semi-structured interviews to discuss her life and education experiences. These interviews lasted between 45 minutes and four hours. Mrs. White had plenty to say about her life and experiences.

**Mr. Lottie Dell Johnson**

Mr. Johnson's skin completion is a creamy, light brown sugar, buttercream color with medium warm tone freckles. His hair, mostly gray with some brown streaks, is short, fine, and straight with a few wiry strands sprinkled throughout his head of hair. His facial dimension is round, yet his features are slightly defined. His brow is average, no significant feature to describe. Mr. Johnson's eye color is of a noticeable calm green hue with brown specks. Mr. Johnson's eyes give the appearance as if he is always in a state of relaxation. Mr. Johnson's cheekbones are positioned neither high nor low. His nose is pointed with a strong, straight nose bridge. His lips are a combination of pink and brown hues with a bit more brown hue due to years of cigarette smoking. There appears to be no wrinkles on Mr. Johnson's face. Mr. Johnson stands about 6'3" inches tall. His posture is sure and correct.

Mr. Lottie Dell Johnson is 76 years old. He was born in 1941 in Moro, Arkansas, which is 17 miles southeast of Brinkley, Arkansas, to Mr. Marshall Johnson and Mrs. Elnora Johnson. Mr. Johnson's parents were from Brinkley, Arkansas. He is the oldest of three sons born to Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. Mr. Johnson's brothers are deceased. One brother died while a baby and the other brother died in 2017. Mr. Johnson lived his entire young adult life with his white grandparents and biracial [Black and white] mother. He moved to Brinkley, AR in 1970 and has lived in Brinkley, Arkansas since.

Mr. Johnson is married to Magnolia Johnson and they have two sons, Jerald, age 55 and Wayne, age 49. Mr. Johnson finished high school, but decided he did not want to attend college. Mr. Johnson was drafted into the Army where he received the Bronze medal. Mr. Johnson and I met several times during March 2017 through June 2018.

During this period, we had four semi-structured interviews to discuss his life and education experiences. These interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes.

**Mr. Harold Thomason**

Mr. Thomason's skin completion is a dusty dark brown. His skin is smooth with very few flaws and scarce fine wrinkles. His hair, what little there is, is mostly gray and cut close to his scalp. His facial dimension is both round and square featuring a wider hairline. Mr. Thomason's eyes are dark brown and pleasing. His cheekbones are positioned perfectly midrange the length of his face. His nose is somewhat snubbed and fleshly with slightly noticeable nostrils. His lips are brown, with a light rose hue, with smooth and even contours. There appears to be no wrinkles on Mr. Thomason's face, except when he frowns or smiles. Mr. Thomason stands about 5'10" inches tall. His posture is slightly bent.

Mr. Thomason is 82 years old. He was born in 1936 in Brinkley, Arkansas, to Mr. Booker T Thomason and Mrs. Ora Lee Smith – Thomason of Brinkley, Arkansas. Mr. Thomason's dad was from Talladega, Alabama, and at some point unknown to Mr. Thomason, moved to McCrory, Arkansas. Mr. Thomason's mother was from Hazen, Arkansas, but grew up in Cotton Plant, Arkansas. Mr. Thomason's parents relocated to Brinkley, Arkansas. Mr. Thomason is the youngest of three sons born to Mr. and Mrs. Thomason.

Mr. Thomason has lived in Brinkley, Arkansas, all my life except for the years he attended college and served in the Army. He was drafted in 1961 and released from service in 1963. Mr. Thomason is a high school and college graduate. He attended

Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock between the years 1955-1959, Jackson State in the summer of 1959, and the University of Wisconsin Madison in summer of 1964. Mr. Thompson has been married twice and has one adult daughter. Mr. Johnson and I met several times during April 2017 through June 2018. During this period, we had three semi-structured interviews to discuss his life and education experiences. These interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes.

## What Experiences Have You Had with Jim Crow - Everyday Life

### Back Door Entrance

**Mrs. White:** I remember, my mother took me, she worked for a white family and their names were Ladens. It was somewhere, I don't know actually where it was, somewhere over by Dean Lumber Company use to be. It was on New Orleans Street, I know that. And she, I was eight years old then, my mother worked for this family. She was cleaning up the house. She had to sweep off the front porch. You had to go in the back door now to get in there and do whatever she had to do. When she got through doing whatever she was doing, she said, well, I am going to go and sweep the front porch. I never will forget that. I was eight years old. She went out the back door with the broom; I thought she was going to sweep the back porch off. She went around to the front porch, swept off the front porch, and then came back around to the back door to come into the house. I couldn't believe it. I never will forget that. I said, as soon as I get old enough, I am getting the heck out of here; that was all I could think. It was terrible. I, that is why I say, I think I was before my time

because I was what you would call, I don't know what they call it, what would you call it. They called it something, I can't remember now. Anyway, I could not stand nothing those people did.

**Wait Your Turn**

**Mrs. White:** I went to Kroger. I was going to buy my mother, I was going to buy a cake. That was in 1980. I got here on the 19 of, the 20 of September was her birthday and on the 19th I was going to buy this cake at Kroger. Wasn't but one cake there. Little piss thang up in there, look like I don't know maybe 18 – 20 years old and she stooped down right at the counter where they got that chicken and all. She stooped down there and I bet you, I know it wasn't that long, but when you know somebody is doing something, it feels like it's an hour. So, she kept on fumbling down there. It was one cake there that I wanted to buy. She kept on fumbling around.

After a while, a little old white lady walked up there and she says, as soon as that white lady walked up there, she stood up and said may I help you. And, I said, no, you may not! I said, I have been standing here for an hour, I know it hasn't been no hour, about 10 minutes I guess. It may not have been 10 minutes. I said, no, you cannot help her. I said, I been standing here an hour and you ain't raised up to help me. And from that, I just got louder and louder.

The lady said, yes, I want that cake right there. I said, no you don't want that cake! I want that cake! And, I got louder and louder. Then here comes the manager. I don't know where he came from and I said, I don't

know what you people think. My money spendable just like hers. And, I said, I been standing here for an hour. I hadn't been standing there for no hour. And, I said, this little lady here; she stooped down under that counter and she never did raise up until this lady here came. I said, when this lady here walked up, she stood up and asked her could she help her and I've been standing here all this time. I said, NO, she can't help her! The lady wants the same cake I want, but I was here first and I want that cake. The manager, he turned off and made me mad. He asked the lady that was standing there, who was here first? And, the lady said she was here first. He said oh. I said, well, you think I got to lie and I went off on the deep end on him. My husband was on pins and needles. I just went crazy. I said, I want that cake. I said to myself, I didn't tell them, I said if she gets that cake and I don't, she'll never take it out of this store because I am going to knock it out of her hand and do a dance and go to jail. That is what I said to myself. Anyways, I got the cake. My husband said, you gonna get us ran out of town. I said, well, we just gonna have to go. Cause, I said, I ain't letting them honkies walk over me no more. That was my words. I ain't letting them walk over me no more.

**See Me**

I STAND! Visible and Invisible...do you see me?

Will **you acknowledge** my existence? OR

Will you pretend that my brown body is **invisible** to you?

It is a fact…I know and you know that YOU SEE ME.

To acknowledge me is to recognize **my humanity – our commonality**.

To **ignore** me is to **deny** me –the truth of my existence.

I STAND – **WHY** do you pretend not to see me?

Here I go again fighting a battle I did not start.

When will this subjugation come to a fucking end!

Well, I STAND and will stay to fight another day.

**YOU SEE ME!** **YOU HEAR ME!**

Hello, I am talking to you.

**Yo People Ain't Welcome Here**

**Mrs. White:** We had a movie theatre in Brinkley. Let me see, the white kids were upstairs and the black kids were downstairs. They had to change that. Because the white kids spit down on the Black kids. It was right across the street on the corner of where Sterling was. It was segregated, but Blacks could go. They always took our money, always took our money. It was never so segregated they wouldn't take the money.

**Ms. Vance:** We had no, at that time, there were no fast food places in Brinkley. They had a few cafes here, but you know, the only thing Black folks could do was work in them. You didn't go in the doctor's office.

They had separate bathrooms, restrooms for Blacks and Whites. And they had a sign up there that said colored. Even in the doctor's office it was split up into two sides, a side for the Colored, and a side that the Whites would sit on until they called you to see the doctor. Even as a young child, we didn't think a whole lot about race. I don't know, it's just something about it. You knew white people were in a different section of town.

You go to the doctor's office, you are on different sides of the waiting room. There were signs up there white and black. They have separate water fountains downtown, one for whites and one for Blacks. Blacks couldn't drink out of the water fountain for whites that they had out there. Oh, you learned at a very early age, a very early age, because your people told you even before you could read, probably even before you can speak. If you wanted some water, as a little kid, I want some water, and you see a white person drinking; your parents would say no you can't drink from there. From that experience, you knew. It doesn't take long to learn when you are young. You learn fast, at a very fast rate. You remember what you learn. We didn't think we could be arrested at the age of 6 or 7, but the police would put you in jail. So, what you do, you protected others. You were very protective of others because you didn't want them to get into trouble. You learned at a very early age. You knew your identity. You knew that you were a Negro at that time. They called you Negro in so many ways. You knew what you could do and what you could not do.

## DiAnna's Reflection

It was just an ordinary sunny day in Brinkley, Arkansas. I think I was about 17 years of age. After completing my homework, I decided to go for a walk; I felt like I needed some exercise. Thus, I walked to my high school to run a few miles around the outdoor track. Well, while walking to my high school, a truck carrying at least three white boys drove passed. One of the white boys shouted the word, nigger. This was the first time in my life someone had called me nigger. Without a single flinch, I immediately shouted the word, honky. Honky, cracker, and peckerwood are the names I have heard my mother used when speaking about white people. As I watched the truck disappear down the road, my body started to feel funny; my heart started to race; fear rose in the pit of my stomach; my hands started to shake; and I felt like I was suppose to run away…but where and why. My mind was confused. I had difficult rationalizing what I was thinking and feeling. I was unsure how to respond to what I was experiencing. Frankly, I did not come to understand or be able to name my body's reactions and my cognitive processing of that event until I was much older and had had many more experiences, directly and indirectly, with racism. This was my first encounter with psychophysiological responses to racist trauma. Although I grew up and was reared in the Southern United States; a place where my ancestors were enslaved and murdered because of their race and my elders were denied their humanity, but fought for their civil rights, I lived a protected and probably sheltered life. My parents, extended family, and my community provided me shelter from the poisonous arrows of whiteness, white supremacy, and racism. I sometimes struggle with this fact. Did the protection of my family and community stifle my growth, or did it provide a path to multiple opportunities and possibilities. I think the

latter with just a pinch of the former. I have reconciled that my family and community chose to protect me from the evilness of racism so that my mind, body, and spirit were not shackled, but free to explore, to be, to stand, to walk, to claim, to be heard, and to rise above without fear.

**Right To Vote**

> **Mrs. White:** I say, my dad couldn't vote unless he go pay poll tax. I say, this is the worst thing in the world. Can't vote, people die; people died to vote. Children died. That makes me so mad with them I don't know what to do. And, these, I don't know, they might be Jehovah Witness, they don't vote. There are a lot of them over there in the projects nah, nah we don't vote. They told me they didn't vote. I was a politician one while. I just quit working for the politicians about two years ago. I thought maybe if I could get the people to go out and vote, well, it wasn't just me, it was, who else, a lot of us; if we could get the people to go out and vote, then we can have a voice. I walked these projects over here, and that is where I found a whole bunch of them. I guess they were Jehovah Witness because they didn't, nah, we don't vote. But they got the same benefits we got. But you know what that is? White people's mentality. That goes way back, way back when – cause they are scared to vote cause they get – one of them told me that Doug Hunt will put us out of the projects if we vote. That was a possibility. I thought about that afterwards. She told me, nah, I have to have a place to stay with my children and Doug Hunt will put us

out of the projects. I heard a couple of more people say the same thing, you know, about Doug Hunt.

**Get Out of Town or Die**

**Mrs. Pighee:** The Porter man who was in the old jailhouse years back, they had hung him. Mrs. Holmes son, they say he was trying to court a white woman. He was in prison and they hung him. Back there, yes ma'am, they did some low down things. Yes, some low down things. Hate to talk about it. They had to put up with it.

I don't know honey, the Bible says you've got to reap what you sow. We all have got something to reap. But they are trying to put on everything. Go back and see what was done in the past and then you won't have to wonder. They don't want to talk about their fore family the way they treated Black folks. They don't want to do that! It will cause a bad war. Now, that's my feeling! If they go back and bring up that low down stuff been done.

**Mrs. White:** I had a little boyfriend. Now, George, he was a militant. That's the word, militant; George he was. We call ourselves courting and everything. I don't know what George did or what happened, but I do know they had to sneak him out of town to keep him from being hurt. Sho did. A lot of people had to leave town to keep from killing somebody or getting killed. George couldn't come back home. He did come back home, I guess, 50 years later because he died here. That was my intended husband.

He was probably 17 or 18, very young, when they shipped him away. They had to get him out of here by night. He couldn't come back. And they were, at that time, I've never seen anybody lynched, but they were always talking about, you know, lynching, especially Blacks. Now, I have never heard of a white person being lynched. So, that was my romance. It was ending.

**Stop the Madness**

WILL someone, anyone, please TURN OFF the noise!
What is this noise you ask?

It is the overt and covert MICRO and MACRO aggressions of whiteness attacking my being…my being...identified as a Black body.

POSITIONED AND ASSUMED as INFERIOR.

ATTACKING my mind…my consciousness, ENSLAVED AND CRAZED due to lack of FREEDOM, freedom to be, to live, to express….ME.

My body, my mind…less than. Less than what?

Less than EVERYTHING and EVERY OTHER NON-BROWN/BLACK HUMAN BEING.

**Call Me Mister**

**Mrs. White:** That is another thing old Dean did to me, too. I, we were getting this house. We put a new bath in the back bedroom. We let it out and put a bathroom in there. We got two full baths in this house. We were buying stuff from Dean Lumber Co. and Mr. Johnny Hilliard he was helping. I went in there, Johnny, his son – well, I say, Johnny was all right with me cause he was one of the young people and he wasn't stuck with all the prejudice. I walked in there and he sitting over there looking over

his glasses, and I said Johnny I need this and I need that and Johnny said ok and what else do you need. I kept saying, I don't know why I kept saying Johnny, but I said Johnny I want this and I want that. Don't you know how to say Mr. Dean. I said, I sure in the H don't. I says, why – and Johnny he was – aw dad, dad, he was trying to quiet his dad down. The dad got red as a beet and acted a fool. I done picked out all this stuff. I mean it was thousands of dollars of stuff. I said, well I tell you what, since I got to say Mr. Dean, you take this stuff - and I walked out and left it all there. I didn't get it and I went down to Ridout and got it. Little Johnny was so sick, he didn't know what to do cause he had about $2000 worth of stuff I was about to buy. Right. I can't spend my money with nobody like that. Johnny said, little Johnny said, oh Samella, don't do that. I said, yeah, Johnny I can't do it. I'm sorry. I say, ain't no fault of yours, it's your daddy. And, I walked out of there I didn't buy nothing. So, I went on down to Ridout and got it. So, that made them upset. I ordered it and I said Mr. Jody will be down here to get it. That was it. I said, boy, Johnny Dean, old man Johnny I am talking about. I know one thing, I ain't gonna let them peoples, shoot, I ain't thinking about them.

**Our Best Customers Were White**

**Mr. Thomason:** I tell ya being in the store, our best customers were the white people. You learn at an early age that, well, they always taught us be nice to everybody, this was before we got into the store. When we got in the store, you just naturally nice to people. They got along with us and that

helped us. They would do things for us, unbelievable. So, we didn't have the opportunity to, to separate, you know, well, they, you know how some people say White people this, that, and thus, and so forth; that wasn't even in our thought. Mom and dad just didn't play that. Just treat everybody right regardless of who they are.

## Employment

### That DAMN Cotton

**Ms. Vance:** There were no jobs here for Black teenagers to do except for working in the cotton field. That was the main labor, cotton field. That's all we did. We chopped cotton. We picked cotton. We had split seasons. I think we, I am trying, it's been so long ago; because I finished high school in 1964 under segregation. They had not integrated then. So, up until that time, we, I think we got out, I don't know if it was the first of May or the middle of May. They would let us out to chop the cotton. Those hot months, June, and July, we would be in the field chopping cotton. After we finished, chopping season was over probably by the last of August or the first of September, we went back to school and we stayed until, I may be kind of confused on the date. All I know is that we chopped the cotton and then we went back until the cotton was ready to harvest, to be picked. Then we went back to pick cotton. I think we got out, let's say for example, we got out in September and we didn't have to return until maybe about the first of November, I say. Most of the cotton had been picked by then. From November through May [we were in school], until

the season came to chop cotton again. You got out after it was chopped. We waited until the chopped cotton matured, produced, then we got out again to pick the cotton. When I say, let me tell you it was hard life, very hard!

As a matter of fact, I tell people I was right on the tail end of slavery. To me, it was a source of slavery because when we started, I started working in the field when I was 8 years old, you had to chop all day long up to 10 hours; 10-hour workdays for $2 a day. $2 per day! 10 hours, you got a 30-minute lunch break. Yes, ma'am. That is the kind of life we had.

For one thing honey, we didn't want to spend the rest of our life in the cotton field. We got tired of picking cotton! You don't know anything about it. Worms on the stock eating the leaves, small, they call them armyworms. Yeah! Chopping cotton all day long in the heat.

I think the last time I went to the fields I think it was back in 19…I want to say 1963. I believe because I graduated from high school in 1964 and I didn't chop that year. I didn't pick any cotton that year; that's when I went to college, UAPB. It was a hard life.

**Mrs. Washington:** Let's see, Black folks didn't get the opportunity as they get now. And in a small town most of the peoples you know em and they weren't growing, whatever you call it; they weren't too enthusiastic. You didn't have anybody to motivate ya to keep you going. That's about all I can tell you on that one. Because it was a small town? Small town and

most of the Black folks didn't have nothing to do but chop cotton, pick cotton. You go to school every now and then cause you had to stay out of school just to do that. Not too many opportunities because you didn't have the money to go on further.

**Mrs. Pighee:** We picked cotton for .50 cents a hundred. Many days. Cotton. Chopping. That is difficult because cotton grows in these little buds and you have to get in there and get that cotton out. My sister, and myself, and an old lady in August; she would take us out there to chop the weeds out of the cotton getting it ready for fall. Now, they use to have split school and I think that school would be out in November. I think you had a couple of months out. We picked cotton. We had to do all of that when we were coming up. Yeah, let me see. Uh, April, May, June and then October and November we were out of school to pick cotton. During that time, I had to be around 12 maybe younger. That is the main thing cause I look back, I had 10 children, but the Lord let us made it. That is how we made it; it wasn't easy. No it wasn't!

**Ms. Vance:** I worked in the field I guess until I was about 16 or 17. That was the only way we could make any money. There were no jobs for us. They had a lot of Blacks who were farmers. They did what you call sharecropping. They never got out of debt. Because what they would do, I don't know how they did it, I don't know if they did it on the fourth to purchase supplies for the land, the feed, or whatever, or equipment. After the crops harvest, you got, supposedly have gotten, a fourth of what was

made. But in many cases, they didn't. They didn't get anything. The farmer that you were working for, which was always white, set the prices for your crops. Black folks didn't own enough land to self-farm. They might have own a little land, but not enough to do any large-scale farming, you know. Most of the time, you got what was given to you. I talked with my grandparents, they had it harder than I did. Their parents had it harder than they did. My grandmother was born, I think 1895. Her husband, grandpa, I remember was born in 1886. So, my grandmother, I think her mother was probably born, might have been born in slavery, on the tail end of slavery. I do know that great-grandmother was a slave. Because you know, they didn't abolish slavery until 1865. See, those people, and according to my grandfather, they had it very hard because when they abolished slavery, they had absolutely nothing. In any case they were promised, you probably don't remember because you are so young, 40 acres and a mule. Well, a lot of them never got that.

**White Control**

**Mr. Thomason:** It does not have to be the dead, dull situation that it's in. There were some of the business people and some of the farmers of this city, killed it. The J B Hunt trucking, over there at Protho Junction; you know that is Doug Hunt's brother, he wanted to set up here. They stopped that. You know the Maybelline plant over there. They wanted to set up here. They stopped that. You know the Remington Arm. They wanted to set up here. They stopped that. You know Wal-Mart distribution center up

there in Searcy. They wanted to set up here. They stopped that. They killed Brinkley. If those industries had come in, people that was on the farm was going to leave the farm and go work for them because they would pay more money. Well, farming then is not like farming now. I haven't actually seen it, but I have seen it on TV. They can operate a tractor by satellite. Nobody on it. You don't need the people in the field that you did back then. The technology has advanced that much.

I don't want to call the name of one of the peoples, one of our bankers, you know him that was big in stopping him. He said this is a small wage town and I am going to keep it that way. A low wage town, I'm sorry. This is a low wage town and I am going to keep it that way. Now, I am not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but let's get real. The more industries you have the better salaries people are making and the more cars they are going to buy. Where are they going to go to get the money? At the bank. The more homes you are going to buy. Where are you going to go to get the money? The bank. Now, I am not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I, I just couldn't see why an individual would do that. Help kill those industries.

You are killing it. You are getting all the money you can because you don't have to pay the people the top salary to do your work. So, you are pocketing the money, because you are not paying them. Even if you paid them more money with all the interest you still going to be making more money.

It's just like Brinkley use to have an outstanding athletic thing, it's not anymore. Not what it use to be because you don't have the kids here. You don't have the people here to participate and we are just low, very low. I try to talk to people, who have a little influence, but nothing has happened.

**Know Your Worth**

**Mrs. White:** I tell you something else that I did. When I came here, I was going to get a job, and they had a little motor factory up there. I went up there, no, first they just fixing to get it in, bring it in here. I never will forget old Dean, Johnny Dean. I'll never forget him. He and, I don't know who the other fellow was, but I ain't never gonna forget Johnny. They, up here right behind State Farm, that building, they had a place, call themselves training for a job, for that job. I had filled out my application. I wrote on there I had two years of college. He said – the one man wanted to pay $5 an hour – and old Johnny Dean said, never, I never let her come in here paying $5 an hour. They went on through the little application – she got two years of college, we'll start her off at $3.50. Now, that's a lot of money for – I said, well I be darn and I got mad, but I said, I am going to go through with this. I am going to see what is going to happen. I got mad. Anyways, they hired me.

I went to work. My uncle, my mother's brother, he was sick. He lived in Newport. So, I went to Newport and got him and bought him here, right here in my house. He had prostate cancer. One day my uncle took

extremely ill. My husband and I we went to Newport; took him to his hospital. I didn't go to work. When I come back to work, they asked, how come you were off from work? I said, my uncle got very sick and I had to take him to the hospital. Well, you can't be missing no time. We gonna let you go this time, but if you miss another day, you gonna lose your job.

I told Dave [husband], I say, I'm 51 years old. I told Dave, I said, them honkies up there mess around – He said, why don't you just quit your job. I said, no, I ain't gonna quit. I am gonna make them make me quit. I missed another day with my uncle. They took me back to kangaroo court and they went to asking me all these stupid questions.

White, they didn't call me Mrs. White. White you got to come to the office. Got it over the intercom where everybody can know it is me. I goes to the office and here we go again in this kangaroo court. See, I wasn't no nice lady like I am now and I wasn't trying to live no Christian life like I am trying to live now. They just kept on messing with me and Samella came out. I didn't say no bad words, I never say bad words, but I can say something so nasty that it would be worst than a bad word. So, anyways, they tell me, well, now you have, you got one more chance. You got one more chance to be off; then you are automatically fired. I said, well, I tell you what you do, I said, you give me my money now. I am automatically quitting. I say, here is my address and you mail it to me. And you take this job and stick it. I didn't say where. I walked on out of that place, come on home, and I told, I was so mad, I didn't know what to

do. I told my husband. He said, I told you to quit that job; you don't need that job. I was 51 years old and I ain't never had another job since. Not no more since.

**R E S P E C T**

**Mrs. White:** The next thing that got me, it was the Laden family. They lived out there in the Bethlehem community where your dad's people lived. They had a boy around the same age as me. We were real little kids, I mean real bitty kids. We were so little, we weren't working in the field, but we were out there. We were like that all the time. We grew up like that. When we got, I think he may have been a couple of years older than me, I don't know. Anyway, he went into service after we done got to be, well, I was a teenager. And when he came back home; the ice cream parlor was up there where the dentist office is now, right there on the corner. I went in to get an ice cream, it was on a Saturday. You know you didn't get a chance to go into town but on a Saturday. I went in to get an ice cream cone and he was there behind the counter. His parents; they must have owned it. Anyway, when I went in, I am probably 16, 17 years old. And I say, Dayton, what you doing here? His mother said, you mean Mr. Dayton, don't you? And I said, No! I didn't say no' ma. I said, No, I mean Dayton. And she said well, he's a young man now, you have to call him mister. I said, he has to call me, Mr. Laden, that was his last name; if he calls me Ms. Jackson, I'll call him. Anyway, that made me so angry, that I didn't buy the ice cream; I just went on out. Dayton tried to quiet his mom

down because he had gone into service and he knew a little bit about. I say, shoot, I can't be bothered with these people.

They wanted you to say yes sir and yes ma'am to them, but they didn't want to say yes ma'am to you. This is another thing I remember, I don't know who it was, but some white guy called my mother, my mother's name was Millie, and he called her aunt Millie. I told him you ain't never had a black auntie! I said my mother is not your aunt Millie. See, they did that for the older ladies, older peoples to keep from saying Mr. and Mrs. I was so militant. I probably say I hated those people. I probably did. I don't know what hate was. I was very young. That is the thing I can't figure out – I must have been a mighty smart kid and I still feel that I missed out on who and what I could have been. I don't mind because God has been so good to me.

**DiAnna's Reflection**

These conversations bring to mind the cemetery in my hometown. I realize now that all the Black and Brown bodies – my paternal grandmother, grandfather, aunts, and uncles are buried on one side of the cemetery and all the white bodies are buried on the other side of the cemetery. Interestingly, not only is the dead separated by race, but also the living. This segregation of the races is most prevalent on Sunday mornings when good ole southern Christian folks leave their houses and travel to their selective worship places to get their praise on while worshiping their gods. Non-white and white people do not worship in the same building with one another in my hometown.

## My Southern Roots Run Deep

SOUTHERN ROOTS –

The GOOD, the BAD, the UGLY

> Run in my veins like RELAXING in the shade on a hot summer day,
> while eating fresh fruit plucked directly from the vine…blackberries, apples,
> plums and strawberries with FAMILY and FRIENDS.

I can never escape my SOUTHERN ROOTS nor do I want to escape.

My SOUTHERN ROOTS have MADE ME – DIANNA WASHINGTON - the 8th child of Enoch and Pearlie Mae Washington of Brinkley, Arkansas.

Good old NEGROS,
COLOREDS,
BLACKS,
AFRICAN AMERICANS,
Brown skin Americans, mixed blood, Christians,
Southern woman…where did all these labels come from?

My body…brown body

Caste and Class as an INFERIOR human being by a system of oppression.
Systemic…they say.

My existence subjugated by a system of white supremacy!

## How or in What Ways Did Your Experiences with Jim Crow Affect Your Education?

### I Am Not a Mule

> **Mrs. White:** That was another thing. We couldn't go to school like the other kids. We had to go like when it wasn't no time to chop cotton or no time to pick cotton, you know like that. We had to go in the seasons. I thought and I still think I would have been a, I don't know what, but I would have been an educated person if I would have had the chance to go to school. I made up my mind as a child; I didn't have kid the first, I said

if I have any children, they will never pick a bowl of cotton and they well never chop on a row of cotton.

That is another thing they did to me. Me and my brother; I don't even know how old we was; we probably was 7 and 8 years old, something like that, and they put us on a row together to chop cotton. We gonna get paid. Now, they weren't paying but a $1.50 a day. We were so young. They put us on a row together. We stayed out there from sun to sun. I don't know what time we got there, but I know it was real early. When the day was over, they paid us for one person. They didn't pay us for two peoples because we were on that one row together. They gave; I never will forget it, they gave us 75 cents apiece. I said; my dad was a farmer too, I said when I got home if I live to be 100 years old, I will never go back to nobody else's field but yours. That is what I told my dad. I don't won't no money. I was so angry. See, I knew that there was something wrong, but you know I couldn't put my hand on it because I was so young. I said never. And, I have never been back to anybody's field working for money. I went to daddy's field. My daddy was farming. We lived out there in the Bethlehem community.

**Mrs. Pighee:** Well, I think education is one of the wonderful things that an individual could have. Studying the word and putting Jesus first and getting you an education. And, if you do that, you can take care of yourself. You don't have to be worried about this one giving you this and that. You take care of yourself with education. You be a schoolteacher,

you be making a little money. Secretary, may not be all you need to make, but you got a better job than chopping cotton and washing dishes, and scrubbing floors, and what else did they want you to do in these houses. Use to have to do everything. But see, the younger women, they don't have to do that. If you, if they let them, a black young woman can equal up with theirs. Some of them can pass them; they are just that smart.

**Mrs. White:** See that is what use to happen to us too. We had to walk to school. The school bus carried the white kids and they would spit out that window. If you weren't back far enough, you know, they would spit and they picked on you all the time. That was another thing, we come down this hill, where you are going down where your dad and mom use to live, going down that hill, right there by that big church, it was some white kids, I don't know who they were, use to live there. Every time we passed there, we had to run or fight. And, I would be back there fighting by myself. They done be run off and left me. Those kids were picking on us every time we pass there. We had to run or fight and 99% of them were scared and they run. I was crazy enough to try to fight them.

**A Mixed Bag of Tricks**

**Mr. Johnson:** You got out of school in May. May through July you would be working in the fields. You went to school July to September. September to October, or first of November, school was out. You were suppose to have your crop out and then you started back. Yeah, that's the way that worked back then because I remember it too well.

**Mrs. Washington:** All my children finished high school and most of them went to college. My oldest daughter, I think my first three children, all girls, most all of them attended all Black schools. Starting with my fourth child and all the youngest ones, they, I think, attended white schools, black and white schools. They integrated, they integrated and they had to go. That is the only reason they went cause they made them go.

They learned a lot in the Black school, more in the Black school than they did in the mix schools with them. Because in the white school, they don't teach you. If you don't help yourself, they not going to help you. You have to get your own lesson. They just sit there and look at you and send a bad grade home. I got on my kids and made them learn. I sit there and listen to them read, and figure this stuff out, a lot of times I couldn't spell the word myself, but they spell it to me and then I pronounce it.

When my children started going to the school with the whites, the teachers wanted to put them behind and a lot of time I had to go out there and pull my children out of there. They'll say nah, they are better off in here. I knew better because I knew what my kids could do. They couldn't tell me what mine couldn't do because I knew they could. A couple of times I had to go out there and get on them for one or two of them. When your sister started school, I remember white parents, mothers, would say, I am pulling my kids out of this school. They, whites, almost started riots.

Preacher Ladd had a number of the children from the church picket the school for integration.

It's best not to talk about some things. No. Some things best left alone.

My kids use to tell me that the school in this small town of Brinkley didn't prepare them for college. It failed them. But, my kids made it anyways. Thanks be to God.

As their parent, I was involved in pretty near everything the did. They would come in from school and I ask what you do today? How was your day? Did you get into any trouble? Did the teacher do this, or did you do this? Stuff like that. I made sho they got their lesson and stuff out.

My education had a great deal of influence on my children because I could see where they could go places and I couldn't go. I didn't have the opportunity to finish high school, but I made sure my kids exceeded me. A good education is important to getting out of poverty, moving up in life. They could do different things that I couldn't do. They learnt how to talk to people without getting angry. Because some things I can get angry about, but they don't do that. They know how to talk to peoples, meet peoples, have fun with peoples, and most people love them.

Well education means a lot to me. I didn't get it, but they got it. They can go further if they want to. It's no stopping them. You got to have vision and a dream.

**Mrs. White:** I think the education, looking back, I think education when I was in school like 7$^{th}$ and 8$^{th}$ grade and on up, I think it was better then,

then it is now. See, Ms. Campbell, Ms. Trusdale, and all those teachers made you learn what you had to learn. They didn't let you pass, pass you on just because you were old. If you were 19 years old and didn't conquer that first-grade book, you stayed in first grade. That is the way it went. They didn't pass you on just because you were old. Integration, 99% of them are out there for a check, especially those white teachers. They don't care whether you learn anything or not. I do know that them white folks, them good white folks don't care if you get it or not. All they want is a check when it comes to the Black kids.

**Hocus Pocus - Hodgepodge**

**Mrs. Pighee:** We didn't have the books that they had. See, they always had the best books and then they would send the older books down to us. I can't remember what year, I guess my children was almost ready to come out. Trudy, she would know. I can't remember when they start to giving the Blacks the same books they were giving the whites. But through it all we made it. We don't have to go around with our heads down today, we don't have to do that. No, ma'am.

I know Jimmy Goodson he told Ms. Reed ain't no need you sending them boys to school ain't gonna do no good. She say my boys is going to school. Every one of them graduated from high school and some of them from college. She could have given up. See he wanted to keep them out there on the farm.

**Mr. Thomason:** Well, here's the thing about back in those days. White students if they wanted to go there they could, but we couldn't go to the white schools. It's just like many whites would always come to Black churches, but Blacks couldn't go to white churches, back in those days.

When there were new books, the white schools got them. When there were new desks, the white schools got them. The Black school got the hand-me-down desks, got the hand-me-down books. A lot of the desks had been written on, had been carved on.

The school for white students went to the 12th grade. It was a thing, now, I have been told this and I believe it. A lot of the reasons why Black schools in the rural areas didn't go to the 12th grade was to keep you on the farm. If you didn't have an education, you couldn't progress. They needed hands. So, one way to keep them in the fields is to don't educated them; they don't need it. That was the attitude about some of it.

The Brinkley Academy, also called The Consolidated White River Academy, which was a church school. It was the only school in Brinkley that Black students could finish high school. Well, a bunch of ministers got together. They wanted to have a school where Blacks could attend and finish school. It was a school where some ministers could get some training as well. The Consolidated White River District was Brinkley, Holy Groove, New Port, Augusta, all those towns, Des Arc, around in that area. Those were the areas supporting the school. It was a boarding school. It had a girl's dorm and a boy's dorm. Back in those days, it wasn't that

much money. The churches got together and with wagons, they would bring food to the schools so that the kids could eat there. The kids that lived in the dorms where from Wheatley, New Port, Augusta, Des Arc, Hickory Plains. We even had three kids from Chicago that came down. They called it the Brinkley Academy because it was in Brinkley, but it is really the CWRA, White River Academy.

**Ms. Vance:** This was during segregation. When I went to school, even college, we were segregated. Brinkley didn't, Brinkley integrated I think in 1970. I was teaching in Osceola in 1971 when they integrated up there. They had to. Everybody had to be integrated by 71. We never got the latest edition of a textbook; after they got a new edition from Brinkley High School, they send them on over to the Black school and that is what they did. So, a lot of the information we got was old information, outdated.

**Mr. Johnson:** And you know, I never went to an integrated school; always you know a segregated one. It was all black. Basically, up until I started Moro Carver High, I went to a one-room shack. I had to walk 3 miles. It was called, Mount Canaan middle school. We had one teacher and it was up until the eighth grade. All in that community went to that one room school. It was about a 3-mile radius. You walked to school. This one teacher would teach this class. That class would have a study session like. This one teacher taught all these different subjects. I guess it was approximately 25 or 30 of us. This one teacher taught us up until about the eighth grade**.**

You know it was up until, well it went up to the 8th grade. That one teacher taught from first grade on. I had about 3 miles to walk.

It seems like it was easier back then than it is now for younger people to get an education. Because of color, so many different obstacles that they have to come over to accomplish what they might have in mind. We didn't have the same rights back there.

**Mrs. Washington:** And another thing they always bought us those raggedy books out there and holler, y'all better take care of these books. Uhm, I attended school with Mexicans. No white kids at all. I never went to a white school. I always went to a Black School. I like the Black school better than I did the white. The teachers and things were more strict with you. They would try to raise you. Make sure you put your clothes on straight, tuck shirt inside your pants, and when you come through, they gonna speak to you and you had to speak correct. So, it was pretty good in that department. They gonna make sure you learn something.

School in Brinkley, it was alright I guess, but the whites had better school than Blacks did. They had better books and better everything. Black, they just made do with what they had because the school, when I was growing up was just a litter old box, car, house like, with a heater, bathroom outdoors. Mr. Partee, whatever the old man name was would bring the books out there and the teacher would tell us now y'all better take are of these books, old raggedy thangs, the back coming off and some of em had then been writ in and hen holler look on page such and such a

thing. You look over there on page such and such and they been done said some bad word or something. It was weird. But, through it all, we got through it. I didn't finish school because, well, there weren't too much opportunity.

**Black Teachers and Parents Don't Mess Around**

**Ms. Vance:** One of the things that helped us was our teachers. They told us things that were not in the textbook because they knew what we needed. They taught us about survival. How to survive in the world that we were living because, I always say, we are on the tail end of slavery. They and our parents taught you to be respectable of other people. Everybody had to respect everybody you know. Our teachers had already told us what we were going to be coming up against. They told us all you need is two things, determination, and dedication. Don't let that hinder us from doing what we wanted to be in life. So, we didn't. We took them at their word. They told us it was not going to be easy, but you can do it. You can do anything or be anything you want to be. One of the things that they always told us, once you've got it up here, nobody can take it away from you. Make sure you get it up here. That's what we did.

We had some good teachers. They really taught us for life. We had a lot of survival skills. We knew how to survive. We knew we had to work. They let us know, you don't want to be in the cotton field all your life. You can come out; all it takes is determination and dedication. We were dedicated and we were determined to come out of the cotton field.

When we picked the cotton; you know how much we got for a pound? 3 cents per pound. You had to pick 100 pounds to make $3.

As I said earlier, we had teachers, the teachers were concerned about us, the whole person; spiritually, morally, they taught us the best they could with what they had. Because when I came along, all we had was a blackboard and a piece of chalk, some notebook paper, a pencil, and a textbook. That is basically all that we had. So of course, you had more because I am a whole lot older than you are.

I can't ever remember getting a new textbook because they always gave the old edition textbooks from the white school to blacks. We were always behind. We never received, I never received any new books.

**Mrs. Washington:** Well, for one thing the teachers at that time tired to help motivate you to go further and stuff. A lot of times, you can't because you had to stay at home and help out round home. Education was very important. Now, at that time, the older heads had to work and make the children work to survive. So, that had a big impact on us. A lot of them still made it. Some of the parents didn't keep their children out of school to help them. They went on to finish school and off to college and stuff. It was tougher for some families because they didn't have the money. Because my parents were sharecroppers; they had to get them crops out to make a little money, just enough to live on, barely.

It would have been a whole lot different. I could have been riding the bus and going to school instead of out in the filed chopping and

picking cotton and working. That would have been a whole lot difference. Some Blacks went on though. Thank God for them cause they became schoolteachers and come back and help them and so far on. I had a teacher, she was no higher than 13, she was 13 years old when she started. She was a good teacher. When school was out, she went to Philander Smith College and got her degree. She then came back to help. See at that time the teachers didn't get a whole lot of education neither. They just go the smart ones and put them in the classroom with the Blacks. Sometimes we just had a little small room and so far on.

That little old room. It's about 13 or 14 of us in that one room. We had different classes, different sections. We all in this one little room. Okay, the oldest one on that side in a row and younger ones in the class on a different row. It wasn't section off. The teacher would teach each row, this one and that one. She had it in order. She kept the children quite. They weren't rowdy or nothing. Cause all she had to do was write a note and send it home to the parents.

It's worst now than it was in my day. Because now, the Black kids have an opportunity, but they don't use it. Because they ain't been taught or been told about their history. That's about all I am going to say. It's not an easy subject to talk about. Because, I went through tough times and I look at children now days and see how they are just throwing it away. They have no teaching.

> Our teachers always taught us, get your lesson out, you know, learn to read and write and be obedient. Mostly, you know, trying to teach you how to be a decent person and stuff. Although you was decent, it's just empowered you more. You sit there and go through your arithmetic, your reading, your health, and your spelling. When we come in, we have our little devotion, say our little prayers, and sand our little song then we sit down and I think we do our reading first, health, and spelling in the evening. I can't remember all of it.
>
> They need to teach Black kids they history. They can go further. That's all I got to say on that one too. In the home, but if the parents don't know, how are the children going to know? You ain't got no kind of history of Blacks in schoolbooks, information is mostly white.

**DiAnna's Reflection**

Why am I shocked at hearing that my grandparents were sharecroppers? Did I think my family was immune or exempt from economic exploitation? I do not think so. I think that because my generation did not experience the harsh reality of being controlled by the racist regime Jim Crow or the demoralizing existence of being a sharecropper, we have a false sense or maybe even a naïve identity of protection and privilege. This false sense of privilege from economic exploitation by white supremacy may be reinforced by the perceived notion that my generation has more employment and economic opportunities than our elders. Furthermore, I am convinced that because my generation did not experience the brutality of Jim Crow and sharecropping, that we are somewhat disconnected from our families' histories. This disconnect is the result of silent voices or

the lack of sharing personal histories about what our elders experienced while living life in Black and Brown skin under Jim Crow. Because my parents chose to shield us from the oppressive dark reality of their racialized and marginalized existence, my initial reaction to my mother's comments that my grandparents were sharecroppers shook the core of my belief that I, my family, were far removed from the remnants of enslavement. My shock is a direct response to grief; resulting from denial or the false hope that my family did not have to endure such odious existence. I am convinced that my shock is a direct response to grief; resulting from denial or the false hope that my family did not have to endure such odious existence. Although sharecropping may have provided a means by which my family could survive, it was nothing more than restructured enslavement that benefited White landowners and planters, an excellent example of CRT's interest convergence. For you see, White landowners and planters agreed with sharecropping because the land my family sharecropped was owned by a white man who not only charged my family rent for the land, farming equipment, and seed, but also took a percentage of the harvest. My family was indebted to this white man, Mr. Paul Canker; they lived in poverty. This poverty was passed on to my parents. Thank goodness sharecropping ended around the 1950s. That was only 69 years ago. My dad was fourteen and my mom was six.

Fortunately for my siblings and me, my dad decided on a different career path, not an easy path to tread. He became his own boss. My dad was a master carpenter. Unfortunately, this grief has and will continue to be a part of my DNA. Is it possible to reconcile being dehumanized and oppressed under such racist regimes? NO!

Why do white people feel the need to deny freedom to people of color, enforce racist paradigms on the lives of people of color, dominate and control people of color, and kill and steal from people of color to maintain their status? I find it complex and a challenge to comprehend the "why". My only solace is found in trying to understand whiteness and white privilege that sustain white supremacy. For me, whiteness and white privilege are the parameters that define and give life to deliberate acts that systematically attack and destroy specific populations, people of color, for capitalism, power, and status. My elders, as children, wanted simply the opportunity to attend school, to learn, to achieve, to be given an equitable chance to compete. However, the lives of my elders were contained within the structure of white supremacy suppressing equality and equity. I have heard myself say these words before in different settings but addressing the same concern. I ask, once again, how does one reconcile such inhumane treatment?

**Should've, Could've, Would've**

> **Ms. Vance:** If I could change things, when I came alone we would have had, I would have had if I could have done it, if I had the power to do it everything that they were teaching over at the white school we would have had it for the black students too. We would have been able to keep up with what was going on in the world. Then we could have went around to other states and got ideas and brought them back in here. All of us would have been better prepared for life. We would have had jobs and things here. Then the children, once they graduated from high school here, went to college here, they could have come back and helped the community. But we didn't. Like I said, we have nothing.

**Mrs. Washington:** If I could change things, I would get as much of education as I can, but never forget where I came from. And, if I could change things and accomplish what I wanted to accomplish, I would have vision and I would make it better or kill myself trying. People would have a better life, a better opportunity. I would be busy in everything going on. I would be out there in the schools and be trying to get a hospital here, and good peoples to work with and, sighs, it's just, I don't know. Sometimes I say the good Lord knew I didn't need it.

I did not graduate from high school. My mother, if she would have pushed me harder and didn't take me out every time you turn around; have me stay at home help do this, do that, this; I would loved to got a higher education. I would be in all kinds of trouble by now because I done been trying to get in the White House. If I had a good education maybe I could have been a lawyer and when I see injustice I would go for it even if they killed me like they did Martin Luther King. I'll leave that at that. Because you ain't done nothing until you helped somebody else.

It could have been better if we got the chance to go to school more and things weren't so poor where you have to help take care of yourself and family. They say education, but I don't believe that, because it's not equal opportunity. That's my opinion. If we had been were we could just went to school and didn't have to stay home and chop cotton, pick cotton and stuff like that, we would have gotten more of an education then. Education would have made us want to go on. Keep going on higher and

higher as far as you can go. But, no matter how much education you get, you ain't done nothing until you reach back and help those less fortunate than you is. Then you can say you done did something.

**Separate and Unequal**

**Mrs. Pighee:** We would go to the CWR district association. Ms. Campbell, Ms. Burden, Ms. Jones, they would take us. Let me see, I guess your momma would know about it or your daddy. Yes, ma'am, Billy Goat hill. We went there one year and then we went over to the public school because our parents weren't able to pay for us to go over there. Yea, they had some good things going on over there during that time. People enjoyed it. But they finally had to close it down.

I guess they didn't have the funds to keep it open. They were taking over things so fast until it was just hard for us to keep anything open in our name. Well, now they sold the academy to some white peoples over there. I don't know who they sold it, but some white people bought it. They went over to the public school.

I attended all Black school. Yes, ma'am, all Black. Never was with white people. Some of my kids attended school with white students. But not during my day. Schools were all Black. All Black teachers. Now, the superintendent was white. Now them old teachers they were strict teachers, yes, sir. Couldn't talk in class. No, child. Them teachers had control back there I can tell ya. Yes, sir. Mrs. Campbell use to say, pretty

is as pretty does. She means your ways and attitude are pretty if you are right. That was her words.

It was all Black. They had they school; where the school at now. Weren't no Blacks there. This civil right with King, they started integrating these schools. I don't know if it was for the best or not. I just don't know. It gave Blacks more opportunity to progress to get some of these jobs. That is what I liked about it. Because we were chopping cotton for .50 cents a hundred. I mean .50 cents an hour. We picked cotton for .50cents a hundred. Many days. Cotton. Chopping.

But honey, coming up back there we had split term. I am trying to think now, school when did it start, I can't remember. It had to start in October somewhere. I don't think that we started with them. I don't think. I think the white kids start to school before we started. Cause see, let's see, anyways, April, May, June, July, August, I guess. I know we were out of school 2 months to pick cotton to my knowledge. It wasn't to chop cotton. It was to pick cotton. We had split term.

My parents wanted me to have an education. They didn't have an education, but they wanted you to have an education. You couldn't just sit around there and not learn nothing. Because they just didn't allow that. You had to go. They would talk about education. They believe in you. We wouldn't got what we got if it had not been for them staying on us. That is true. You had to study. You couldn't just come and play around. You had

to get your lesson. The old folks, some of them lost their lives trying to make things better for us.

**Mr. Thomason:** My education experience, considering the times, they were great. They were not what they, an experience would be today because at that particular time we did not have access to many of the things that the white schools had and the things that we got was hand-me-downs so to speak. The teachers that we had, they were outstanding. They wanted us to be the very best that we could be. They emphasized being nice, mannerable, and studying hard. It was wonderful.

I went over to the Brinkley Academy. Those teachers they were just outstanding. The most amazing thing about some of them, they had just finished high school and that's all they had. They still gave us the best that they had to offer. They insisted that we study and they were not easy. They didn't let you get away with anything. In other words, they wanted you to be the best that you could be. They didn't let you get away with anything. You know. It was a family connection, a parent teacher connection then.

They could talk to your parents and the parents could say how is Herald doing or how is Booker or Romey or Enoch or anybody. How they doing in school? It was a parent teacher connection; therefore, you couldn't get away with anything. You couldn't get away with stuff. We didn't know any better, but they wanted to give us the best they could give us, and they did. It's amazing that during that time, we had some students

that came out of that situation and get their masters' and some have doctorate degrees and stuff like that. That is pretty amazing, considering.

**DiAnna's Reflection**

Mr. Randolph was the principal of Brinkley schools when I first enrolled in Pre-k. More importantly, Mr. Randolph was Mrs. Vance's teacher for Algebra, and Geometry. Black teachers and administrators stayed within the community for years. At least seven of my siblings attending Brinkley schools while Mr. Randolph was principal. My early memory of enrolling in Pre-k is easy to recall; it feels as if this event happened just yesterday. I was four years old. My brother Timothy was five. Our mom walked us to school to register Timothy for Kindergarten. I was very fond of my older brother; everything he did or tried to do, I also tried to do. So, if Timothy was starting school, so was I.

While standing next to my mom, as she completed paperwork for Timothy, I looked over at Mr. Randolph; he looked like a giant sitting behind his desk. Nevertheless, I wasn't afraid. I walked over to the side of Mr. Randolph's desk and said excused me while tapping on his leg. Mr. Randolph looked down at me, smiled, and asked how may I help you? I proclaimed, if Tim Tim; I couldn't say Timothy, is going to school then I am going to school too. Mr. Randolph laughed, looked at my mom, and said ok. I remembered my mother's face because at this point, I was intensely looking at my mother's face trying to determine, by her facial expression, if I was in trouble. I recall that my mom's face did not show that she was upset, but more surprised that I had approached Mr. Randolph and told him that I wanted to start school. That day, Timothy

and I were registered to start school; Timothy was to start Kindergarten and I was to start Pre-k in the upcoming school term.

At this age, I had no concept or experience with being denied an education or receiving a subpar education. What I do recall, most profoundly, is that the majority of my teachers were African American and female; even though, I attended school after desegregation.

**Flash back:** Mrs. Lucas 8th grade Algebra I. Four students, self, one black male, one white male, and one white female, were briefly detained after school dismissal to perform algebraic problems for two white men and a white woman all wearing dark colored clothing. I was so afraid that I was going to get all of my problems wrong and embarrass Mrs. Lucas, and myself.

**Random thought:** Mrs. Lucas taught middle school during the same era as Ms. Vance. It is remarkable to me that I can recall this experience so clearly just from my conversation with my elder, Ms. Vance, as she recalled her education experiences and interactions with other African Americans teachers. Fast forward to my young adult years.

As an adult, mid-twenties, I was fortunate to speak with Mrs. Lucas, before she passed, about that experienced. She explained to me the term tracking and that our test results were used to not only track our high school academic trajectory, but also to determine high school honor classes and curriculum. After some consideration of Mrs. Lucas' explanation, I understood the ramifications of that experience. It all made sense to me. For you see, because of that experience, my high school schedule for the next four years, grades ninth – twelfth, was set; I was placed in the college bound track, which

meant that I took honor courses and discussed my college plans. Funny thing, most of my honor courses where identical to the classes my brother Timothy was taking. Consequently, I attended class with my brother, although he was one year ahead of me. As might be expected, Timothy was not happy that his little sister was in the same classes as he.

**How or in What Ways Did Your Experiences with Jim Crow Affect Your Life?**

**What's Race Got To Do With It**

EVERYTHING!

RACISM, what do you mean?

Racism by any other name –
biological, INSTITUTIONAL, unconscious, INTENTIONAL, microaggressions,
homophobia, sexism, TOLERANCE

Indifference or coldness,

WHITE PRIVILEGE.

**Racial Identity**

> **Ms. Vance:** Oh, my Lord! I guess about the time I could recognize myself in the mirror, I knew I was Black. What did they call us at that time, Negroes? You knew that because when you went to school for one thing you had your textbook there, they write your name down and they put down you Negro. That is what they write in the book. Yes!
>
> So, at a very early age, oh yes! Everybody knew that. I don't think people started to identify themselves as being Black until back in the, during the Civil Rights movement; when they came out with Black and proud. Some people want to be called Black and some people want to be called African American or whatever. It's like this, I am what I am. A

woman of color and proud of it. You know! And all of us are different colors anyway. We can't help but to be different colors. We have all kinds of genes in us. We are mixed up with Indian and white and everything.

There are no TRUE African-Americans in this country anymore. All of us, we are all different colors. Some of us are light brown some of us are what they call high yellow, call us with the white daddy, mulatto, whatever. We are mixed up with some of everything. I identify as African American, Black. I am proud to be what I am. I never had the desire to be any other race. Just be what I am and be the best at what I can.

**Mrs. Washington:** I say I am African American, but I am really not. So, I identity myself but I don't ever tell nobody that. I Indian. The people of this town identify me as different. They know we are not like they are. So, we are different. Most average person will tell you, oh you not Black, you are mixed with something. They will tell you, you not, you ain't Black, you mixed with something. You must be an Indian! That's what they will say. And then white people look at you funny, too, trying to find out what you are too. And then a lot of times they will ask you, you mixed with what? My parents always, because they was a little scared, so they always would say, Negro or colored. Back then they used Colored people, they didn't use Negro.

Well, if I had been allowed to claim my true race identity, like I should have, it would have been a big help to me. Right, because while I was growing up you couldn 't say what you are. They tell you what you

are. To be honest with you, you don't even really know your own name. You've got uncles and aunties you don't really know. I am going to leave that alone.

Mr. Paul Canker help dad out. He kept dad from having to go back to the reservation. On the census form, he listed dad as mulatto. He hid dad out by allowing him to stay and work the farm.

I became aware of how people saw my skin color while walking home from school. Okay. We had to walk for about 2 or 3 miles while the white kids rid busses. And, they'll pass by and stick their finger up at ya, try to spit out on ya and stuff like that. So we would get on the side of the road, out of the road, were they couldn't.

**Mrs. Pighee:** I am a Negro.

All I know I was just colored. As I grow older, I realize that we were called Negro back there. They call them African Americans now. I realize that as I grow up that's what, you know, I was.

Well, I was so small when I came here. As I grow older, back doing them days just, you didn't know until after you had grown up. We weren't paying things any attention because when it come down to suffering it wasn't what you call real suffering because people could raise everything that they needed. They would sew and make dresses, and clothes, and piece quilts, and bring in their own woods. It wasn't like today. The expenses that they had, maybe some medicine, cause they didn't have a lot of medicine. I don't know how they made it. But,

medicine wasn't a big deal during my days because they could use home remedies and do just as well as doctor medicine doing today. So, when you think about it well, we didn't have freedom like they had. But, when it came down to being able to live and move on in life, we were able to do that because see old, old people always stood on the word of God. If those men didn't, those women did. And they believed that the Lord would take care of them and would provide for them.

Because when we went to school, you know, they didn't talk about it. At home, they didn't hardly talk about it. I guess I was a young lady when I really paid it any attention, about 17 or 18 years old that I, you know, Black. Just never paid things like that any attention. The older people didn't allow you to stay on that too much no way. I say it's for peace. That's the reason they didn't allow us to talk about some of it. It was for peace because they know the condition the other race was in, they never wanted to accept the Black race as being just as much as they was. It's that a way today. Yeah, it's no difference in race of people. We all the same.

I got some people out in Tennessee that look like white folks. Somewhere down the line, a white man had to produce a child by some of my peoples and it come on up through the third and fourth generation. You know they began to rank up quicker then a natural black person. A natural Black person don't rank up real quick. I began to rank up. The Bible said, he will visit the third and fourth generation with sin. I think

that come up regardless to what color you are. See, they don't want to talk about it. See, it was the white man that mixed the color.

That is how I learn about these colors. I say now white man got some back there probably great grandmother. They tell me they use to go by the man's house and the black man would come out and they go in there and use his wife. They've done some dirty things. They don't want to turn that a loose. Yeah, that's how these colors come about. When they come over here, they mixed up. But they started it. I don't know maybe one day some black man will stand up and tell them ya'll started this. We didn't start it. Made them work like I don't know what.

**Mr. Thomason:** How do I racially identify? I don't see race. When you are in a business, you can't afford to see race. Growing up, our parents always taught us to treat everybody right. I don't care, don't matter who they are. That's the way it was. See, I don't know if you know it, but for about 30, right at 33 years I was a wedding photographer.

I shot Black weddings and white weddings. It didn't make a difference. I was in Black churches and just about every white church in Brinkley. I shot weddings. I was in a lot of white homes and they treated me fine. I reciprocated. If I had been snooty and everything, do you think they would have used me. If we hadn't treated people right in that store, they would not have used me. They knew me. They knew my parents. They were always asking me how is Booker and Ora Lee. You just have to be nice to people. I just didn't see race. We had many white friends.

**Mr. Johnson:** I am an African American Black man. Even though racial segregation, I was more prepared than some. It didn't affect me as much because you know I was pretty much raised by a white man. I didn't see white and black. It was a big help to me all the way up until this point. My grandfather he was always, I guess he was, let us get by with too much. He was kind of lenient with us. If somebody ever said anything about what we were doing, grandfather would say them boys work for that. We often had, you know, we were a little fortunate. We buy a car every year or so. We had to work, work hard but we weren't like some. We never really wanted for anything. We always, it was always opportunity for me to, you know, advance or work, have a little money to, for my convenience.

I see how some people respond to life even after I got out of service. My grandparents inspired me to conduct myself, on-the-job, around here, and with different races. Whatever it was, always, you know, I don't care what color you are, talk with you and have a basic conversation. Lady said to me one time, I never would've thought I sit down and talk to someone like you.

**Mrs. White:** I identify, I always say Black. I guess I do. I don't like that word colored by no means. I can go along with Afro American. But, I like, I always say when I am filling out something, if Afro American is on the paper, I'll mark that, but if it is Black and Afro American then I probably will say Black. If it is just Afro American, then I say Afro American.

I guess when I first realize I was Black I guess I was probably 7 or 8 years old, when they kept on talking about colored. It could have been when my mother had to go round that porch, go out the back door. I made up my mind then that I would never work for, never work in a white woman's kitchen.

Another thing they had, you know, you could eat, she could eat, but she couldn't eat on the same table they were eating. It was a little old table over there and she take her food on that table and eat it. I couldn't figure; I tried my best to figure this thing out. I couldn't figure it out. I just couldn't figure just how my parents would put up with that. They were grown people. That is the thing that really did it to me.

They didn't have no other chose. Now that I know, you know. But they didn't have no other chose because they would end up killing the husband and dragging him away, leaving momma with 10 or 12 kids; it didn't make them no difference how many kids you had. So, they didn't have no other chose, back then. I didn't realize that they didn't have no other chose. When I found out they didn't have no other chose, I got to hoping and got on out of here. That's what happened. I don't know. My heart bleeds every time I look back. I try not to look back too much cause it makes my heart bleed.

**DiAnna's Reflection**

My earliest memory about my race or racial identity centers around my mother's comments about being Black and acting Black. She use to tell us, me and my siblings,

"just because people might identify you as Black, you don't have to act Black." I was between the ages of six and seven when I first heard my mother utter these words. Frankly, I was clueless as to what my mother was talking about. Who was Black and what did it mean to "act" Black. Unfortunately, my older siblings weren't much help with assisting me with understanding the meaning behind our mother's worldly advice. I didn't think more about my mother's guidance until I started my undergraduate studies. For you see, it was in this environment that I claim my first personal, face-to-face, experience with systemic racism and racist white people.

Although I had no repertoire from which to identify, understand, or call out such behaviors and talk, I remember all my mother tried to teach me about life and society. So, as a first-year college student, I asked my mom what she meant by just because people may identify me as Black, I didn't have to act Black. Her explanation went something like this, well, Dinah there are some people in this world that will call you all sort of names. Remember they do not know you and those names are not who you are. Your race will change depending on people, places, and events. Just remember, you are the daughter of Enoch and Pearlie Washington and your people are movers and shakers. When you step outside our home, you and your behavior reflect you, your family and parents, and your community. Therefore, you are always to be on your best behavior. You are no one's clown. You are smart and beautiful. Dinah, you can conquer the world. These words have and will continue to guide me throughout my life.

As I matured, my understanding of my mother's wisdom matured. My mom is a wise woman. She has a PhD in living life as a colored woman from the University of Life. She understood that white American society had negatively scripted and

characterized Black people and that these negative descriptors of Black people were reinforced through media outlets. Although my mother has less than a high school education and has never read or heard of any critical Black or white race scholars, she understood that the ramifications of her and her children being racially scripted to maintain white supremacy and that the survival of white supremacy demanded subjugation of Black people. Her act of heroism was to teach her children about the destructive and deceptive nature of race and racism. Therefore, not to act Black meant that it was incumbent upon me to free my mind, body, and spirit from the evil, dehumanizing, and oppressive grips of colonialism. Freedom from colonialism is a lifelong battle.

**Who I Am**

Who am I in this vast land of brown skin people?

My BEGINNING might be infused with A LEGACY of inhuman treatment;

unyielding soil - saturated with the blood and sweat of the enslaved- my ancestors; WHO GREW UP in the

**dark and ugly shadows of enslavement**;

SURVIVING the **demoralizing impact of Jim Crow**;

THE **psychophysiological trauma** - a pain-staking journey that included endless mental, physical, and emotional abuse only to be SUBJUGATED to a position of inferiority.

I NOW LIVE
Feeling the warmth of a **new day sun**

BECAUSE
my elders forged the path upon which **NOW I STAND** and embark.

THEREFORE,

MY END is a resilient spirit that NEVER DIES but evolves into stronger beings who continue to multiple and replenish humankind.

I am THE VOICE out of the wilderness

The sculptured body of the ABUSED,

The IMMORTAL SOUL of all those who came before me,

and ultimately the FIERY SPIRIT of my ancestors that FLOWS effortlessly in my vines

Enabling me to keep on moving and giving me LIFE.

"I" am a descendant of royalty! My royalty includes a BLOODLINE of

WARRIORS, high priests and priestess,
KINGS and QUEENS, SCIENTISTS, INVENTORS, and highly favored people.

Oh yes ma'am! I am!

Let the TRUTH be told!

I am a SURVIVOR of the fittest!

## Nothing New Under the Sun: Living Life

**Mrs. Washington:** I was born here in Brinkley; raised here in Brinkley. Lived on a farm out in the country where we mostly played with the children in the neighborhood. I didn't get out very much so I really wouldn't know what Brinkley was like. When I did get out it was big to me.

I do remember that, well, weren't too many opportunities. The biggest opportunity you had was chopping cotton, picking cotton, and house cleaning and that was about it. It was a small town – your mind don't grow as fast. Big town, you have more to look forward to.

**Mrs. Pighee:** Jim Crow is undercover. Them whites. That's what it is. Like when you go to the doctor's office, I still think they are going to do things for the white folks that they are not going to do for us. They going to slip under the covers and do more for their people than they do for us, and that is the reason we have to stand up. Because the white people, some of them in authority, is just as dishonest as they can be.

I try not to look back. I am quite sure a lot of them my age living now they don't want to look back. The time the Lord got for you to live, if you want to be happy you don't want to just be sorry all the time.

**Mr. Thomason:** The community was sort of separate those days you know what I mean because of racial segregation. Even then, one of the most amazing thing was a lot of the white people were on your side. They would tell my mother and dad in a minute if they saw me doing something

wrong. They knew that Booker and Ora Lee didn't play that. They wanted you to be the best.

**Ms. Vance:** We need innovation – true innovation- not reinventing the wheel or application of pre-existing rule or category. The game has not changed, just the players - new generations of people, yet still the haves and the have not's.

Being Black. I tell you what, we knew we were Black as I came along during the civil rights movement and under segregation. I knew that if I stayed here, it was either teaching in the Black school or go somewhere out-of-state to get a job because there were no jobs. Well, there were no jobs here for black folks. There are plenty of jobs, but not for us. Certain jobs Black folks just didn't get here.

**Mrs. White:** Well, it was 19 [didn't say full year] when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus and 19 [didn't say full year] when public transportation was integrated. My hometown didn't get the memo. We had a bus station. That bus station, it was torn down. It was a brand-new bus station. You know they built it, but would not integrate it; this side was white and that side was black. The greyhound bus station that is what it was. Because they would not integrate, you know the bus station, they torn it down. That is what happened to that bus stations. It was right on the corner of this street out here. They closed it down. The bus station people closed it down because they wouldn't integrate. I guess they just

tore it down. It was a beautiful bus station. That is the reason why I couldn't stand those people. You might snap and kill.

**God: My Rock and My Shield**

**Mrs. White:** Well, I, I know if I hadn't been accepted Christ as my savior, Lord and Savior, I know that I would done kill me somebody and gone to jail and thought nothing of it. Even though being a saved person, you have to really stay on your toes and ask God to order your steps and keep you because you can just – I am telling you.

**Mrs. Pighee:** I have seen a lot and only God can carry you through it. Don't let nobody fool you. God can do things you don't even know he is doing. You just be amazed at what happened and how you came through. God is good. We got Black folks now, young folks in good positions. But, they know they still got to watch them. They know that. I know. That's right. You have to pray and ask the Lord to let me go on. They are something else. And, when times get like they is, you have to watch them. They are going to cut here and cut there. When you know anything, the white folks still going on.

We had some joyful days. Some of them weren't too joyful. I was married at 16. Yeah, that was young. I think my sister married; she married early, she might have married at 15. I think she married before I did. I had twelve children; ten boys and two girls. I had one miscarriage and two died very young; 8 months and 18 months. I got up at 4:00 in the morning making fires and cooking breakfast. Sometimes I look back and

wonder. I say Lord, I know you enable me to come through to mother 12 children. And now Henry went to WWII and most of them men that come out of the Army, they are not the same. So, he turn out to be a alcoholic, but on the end of his life he got better. I went through so many years with that. I can remember getting up at 4:00 (laughter) put wood in the stove, making a fire in the wood stove. Then he finally get up. I done fix him some breakfast. Children, they finally get up. I done fix them some breakfast. It wasn't an easy life, but when you look back on it, you know God brought you through.

When I look back, you know, the Lord taken care of the women as well so as the men. See, women got out and picked berries and dewberries. We would find a peach tree or plum tree and make jelly out of that. We raised chicken. We raised hogs. We raised beautiful gardens. We had a lot of stuff that we did and that is what kept the family going. I didn't want to see my children come through the hardship that I come through. We try to make it better for them.

Only thing that I can say, God was with us and we didn't worry about having a lot of material things. We could raise gardens, pick peaches and apples, raise hogs, and raise our families. That was the kind of life that we had. We never just go to the store, pick up stuff, and pay for it because you didn't have the money to pay for it. But life, the Lord just taken care of us through those times. It was hard. Cause some of us would have to get up at 4:00 in the morning and make fires. I look back and I think about

how the Lord brought me over with all those kids. Not sufficient clothes, no warm caps and things like they got now. It was just a big difference.

**DiAnna's Reflection**

Taking this journey with my elders is painful. I stumble over my words; I am uncomfortable with our silence; I want to cry…and so I do, on the inside. I want to say I am sorry, but the words are stuck in my throat. There is no consoling my elders. I watch them as they struggle with the psychophysiological trauma of brutal systemic racism. Their bodies distort under the visceral pain. Their cognitive responses floating in the air trying to rationalize the irrational behaviors of white people…unjustifiable hate. What do I do? What do I say? I sit. I listen. I learn. I love. I respect. I honor. Then, I hear soft-spoken words in the vastness of our pain…

**Lest You Forget**

PAUSE. . . STOP. . . WAIT. . . CRY. . . HATE. . . LAUGH. . .

Let go, Hold on…

INHALE

Memories – hard times – no respect – DAMN, NO HUMAN RIGHTS –

you're not human, but PROPERTY…counted with head of cattle, hogs, and other farm animals –

SOLD, by one man to another man – without concern OR consideration for family;

separated from parents and siblings – for a profit…

WHITE'S MAN PROFIT.

LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP and LET ME DIE FREE. . .EXHALE

How arrogant of me to think that asking my elders to recall and tell me their life stories would be an easy walk down memory lane. I failed to realize that what I was actually asking my elders to do was to revisit and relive their lives, their history, my history, American history with all its bitterness, hatred, evilness, and death. As I embarked on this journey with my elders, I experienced mixed emotions, long pauses, questions with no answers, and heaviness within my spirit and body - psychophysiological trauma. A psychophysiological response to trauma is the combination of various traumatic stressors that an individual experiences and displays as he or she tries to cope with daily life and living. I express -

**Taken**

Standing on the shores of mother earth

Looking out across the vast water

Wondering if I will ever see you again

I AM YOUR MOTHER, FATHER, BROTHER, SISTER

I am the SPIRIT that connect us

You will feel my gentle nudge when you struggle to keep moving

You will hear me whisper words of encouragement when the world shouts dissuasions

You may have been taken from me, but know that

Wherever you go, I will always be with you

Our Spirits forever soar

## Conclusion

Chapter IV presented robust details of my elders' life stories concerning their lived experiences and educational journeys as African Americans who survived the Jim

Crow era as residents of Brinkley, Arkansas. My elders' life stories were not altered to ensure authentication of their voices. Their narratives were positioned as powerful weapons of counter-storytelling to confront the white dominant narratives about their lived experiences. Moreover, my elders' voices were positioned to confront colonialized research that oppresses, denies, and eliminates the lived experiences of people of color. As for my voice, my voice was presented in poetic freestyle. Poetic freestyle allowed me to share my emotions and feelings regarding my reactions to my elders' comments, my connections to my elders, and my relationship with my community. The next chapter will analyze my findings.

# CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

Researchers (Anderson, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Bullock, 1967; Dollard, 1988; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963; Horsford, 2011; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wilder, 2014) have studied how education for Black people was racially scripted to sustain derogatory narratives about Blacks' intellectual abilities and educational determinations. In addition, the literature supports that African Americans fighting for their right to an education is historically linked to atrocious acts of racism and systemic inequalities (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1995; Wilder, 2014). Furthermore, researchers (Black, 1960; Davis, 1989; Dollard, 1998; Hansan, 2011; Hoelscher, 2003; Hollinger, 2005; Kennedy, 2011; Khanna, 2010; Pilgrim, 2000; Saperstein & Penner, 2012; Saperstein, Penner, & Light, 2013; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005) have reported on how the lives of African Americans were controlled by racist regimes, such as the one-drop rule, Black codes, and separate but equal legal regulations. Thus, the lives and educational opportunities of Black people being controlled by racist ideologies and legal regulations are not new phenomena. In response to this history, I sought to explore how Jim Crow laws and norms shaped the lived experiences and educational journeys of six Black people who did not join the great migration (Wilkerson, 2014), but remained in the rural Southern Black Belt, Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas, during the Jim Crow era. These six Black people did more than just remain in the Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas; they fought the violent, vicious, and racist Jim Crow anti-black way of life through individual and collective agency. Accordingly, it is an honor for me to call these six Black people my elders.

Rich descriptions of my elders' lived experiences and educational journeys as they resisted and survived Jim Crow in action were structured using a phenomenological critical race qualitative approach. Phenomenological research methods and the tenets of Critical Race Theory were used to organize and analyze data. The five steps to phenomenological research methods of analysis included reading the transcripts, re-reading transcripts to delineate meanings within and from participants' life stories, eliminating redundancies and elaborating on identified meanings, creating essences from participants' experiences by asking what do the meanings reveal, and synthesizing and integrating descriptions of participants' life stories into robust representations of participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). This study, therefore, was based on three phenomenological research inquiries posed to the participants:

> 1) What experiences have you had with Jim Crow, legal segregation, as an African American residing in Brinkley, Arkansas - the rural Southern Black Belt?
>
> 2) How or in what ways did your experiences with Jim Crow affect your education?
>
> 3) How or in what ways did your experiences with Jim Crow affect your life?

Data were collected through multiple semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews of six of my elders, four women and two men.

Interpreting the data from these three phenomenological research inquiries yielded four significant intersecting themes, 1) the survival of racism as part of everyday life, 2) economic exploitation of Black labor, 3) denial of equitable education, and 4) the sociopolitical construction of racial identity. These four intersecting themes traverse intricately with CRT tenets. The tenets of CRT identify racism, call out white privilege,

and acknowledge the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities as a source of power and strength that can combat colonialized research (Collins, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Five tenets of CRT were used to construct robust descriptions of my elders' stories as vignettes shared in Chapter Four. Every tenet of CRT infused my elders' counter-stories and pervaded each theme; thus, it was impossible to select just one tenet to capture the pervasive oppression of the racist regime of Jim Crow. Therefore, the five tenets of CRT weaved throughout each theme.

My elders' stories were positioned as weapons of confrontation to combat the dominant white narratives that have oppressed their lived experiences and educational journeys as survivors of Jim Crow laws and norms. CRT defines these weapons of confrontation as a process of counter storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). According to CRT, the idea of counter-storytelling comes from its powerful, persuasive, and critical ability to unlearn beliefs that are commonly believed to be true based on the dominant white supremacy narrative. This being so, this tenet serves as the foundation of my elders' counter-stories. Counter storytelling constructs worldviews and interactions between and among people to challenge and eliminate pernicious dominant white racist narratives and beliefs.

The additional four tenets of CRT are used to analyze my elders' narratives by exposing racial inequalities and discrimination, and confronting oppressive systemic agencies that sustain racist structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). First, racism is the natural order of business governing power structures and systems of human interactions that go unacknowledged or are blatantly denied making it virtually

impossible to confront. Second, whites only acknowledge and oppose racism if doing so will benefit their lives. This ideology is known as interest convergence (Bell, 1975). Third, race is a sociopolitical construct (Haney-Lopez, 1994). Fourth, minoritized groups are racialized according to political, economic, and social contexts. These four tenets traverse the essences of my elders' counter-stories as they relate to surviving racism as part of everyday life, economic exploitation of Black labor, the denial of equitable education, and the sociopolitical construction of racial identity. The voices of my elders set the stage for my analysis.

## Theme One: Surviving Racism as Part of Everyday Life

### The Pain

Where do I start, the pain, the agony, the frustration, the confusion… I think I am about to lose my mind, and if these white folks don't get the hell out of my way, I might just catch a case!

What is this pain, this agony, this frustration you might ask,

IF you so dare to engage in the critical conversation and personal exploration of your own psychic,

I would tell you that this pain, this agony, this frustration is the psychophysiological rape of my mind, body, and attempt on my soul orchestrated by white supremacy… a system of micro, macro, ism, denial, hell whatever label you want to call it - dished out by systems and individuals as sweet candy.

**Taste and Die!**

Hansel and Gretel ain't got nothing on this poison.

According to Critical Race Theory, racism in the United States is an ordinary, standard business practice, and is a part of everyday life for most people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). It is essential to explore the phenomenon of Jim Crow briefly

to understand the historical influence of racism as the natural order of business. The literature illustrated that Jim Crow was a caste and class system that began as an idea, a conscious thought formulated in the mind of an individual or the minds of individuals (Kennedy, 2011; Pilgrim, 2000; Woodward, 1966). These individuals included, but were not limited to, politicians, ministers, scientists, teachers, and proletarians. The idea of Jim Crow gave birth to a scheme. This scheme produced social etiquette norms known as Black Codes and a legal system known as Jim Crow Laws. However, Jim Crow was more than a series of anti-Black laws and social etiquette norms. It was a way of life that positioned Black people as second-class citizens (Black, 1960; Davis, 1989; Dollard, 1998; Hansan, 2011; Kennedy, 2011; Pilgrim, 2000; Woodward, 1966). Examples of this ordered system included, Supreme Court cases *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), and *Jane Doe v. Louisiana* (1985), and numerous state laws (Kennedy, 2011; Pilgrim, 2000) that sanctioned separate but equal regulations regarding communal interactions between Black people and whites. Supreme Court decisions and state laws were, thus, the structural forces that socially scripted race, particularly for Black people, and enforced institutional racism and the denial of human rights. These dominant racial scripts connected "racialized groups" (Molina, 2014, p. 6) across time and space, imposing prescribed socialization principles upon groups. Jim Crow was a vicious, violent, and defensive system marketed, advertised, and ultimately normalized as a way of life. Better yet, Jim Crow was a blatant racist propaganda that created and sustained everyday racism. I am of the opinion that these normalized experiences are better understood as normalized insanity; the brainwashing of Black minds – the assimilation into racist white culture.

Let me explain. When you think of the American Dream, what comes to mind? Do not think about the end product. Instead, think about it's inception. Marchand (1985) provided a prophetically unambiguous depiction of how the American Dream was socially constructed via advertisement regimes during the 1920s – 1940s. Advertising agencies used conning methods of distorted mirrors, "Zerrspiegel" (p. xvii), to beguile people with elusive and erroneous images of an idyllic American life. Poetic descriptions and beautifully displayed pictures of happy families with nicely manicured lawns, shiny new automobiles in their driveways, friendly neighbors waving hello, and little blue eyed and blond hair children peacefully playing were offered as incentives to anyone convinced to buy and even go into debt to obtain this socially constructed American Dream. Thus, consumerism was created, and capitalism was reinforced.

It is important to point out that these socially constructed depictions were not representational reflections of the lives of my elders who, during this period, had no civil rights, were denied education, and were controlled by de jure segregation (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hansan, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walker 1996; Wilder, 2014). What my elders experienced was Jim Crow in action. The Jim Crow system was an essential component of the origins of the America Dream's indefensible racist ideologies that imposed racist inequalities, disparities, and discriminatory sanctions on the lives of my elders. The principles of Jim Crow were grounded in forced assimilation, political agendas perpetuating white supremacy, derogatory racial scripts, and societal constructs designed to control the lives of Black people. Jim Crow was a raw and destructive system that killed, stole, dehumanized, and ultimately defined and sustained brutal whiteness that severely oppressed and denied Black people's freedom

and humanity. What's more, the life expectancy of Black people in the United States (CDC, Table 5.1) have an intimate relationship with the barbaric practice of lynching, an act of terrorism, violent public acts of torture carried out by white America and tolerated by state and federal officials (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017, Table 5.2). This form of white rage was used to traumatize the black population. Moreover, the mass lynching and killings of Black people is southern states fueled the great migration of Black people from southern soils to northern territories in search of freedom (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017).

Table 5.1

*Life Expectancy by Race and Sex, 1930 – 2010*

| Year | **Black Female** | **White Female** | **Black Male** | **White Male** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1930 | 49.2 | 63.5 | 47.3 | 59.7 |
| 1940 | - | 66.6 | - | 62.1 |
| 1950 | - | 72.2 | - | 66.5 |
| 1960 | - | 74.1 | - | 67.4 |
| 1970 | 68.3 | 75.6 | 60 | 68 |
| 1980 | 72.5 | 78.01 | 63.8 | 70.7 |
| 1990 | 73.6 | 79.4 | 64.5 | 72.7 |
| 2000 | 75.2 | 74.9 | 68.3 | 77.6 |
| 2010 | 78 | 81.3 | 71.8 | 76.5 |

Table 5.2

Lynchings - *African Americans in Arkansas and by counties 1877 – 1950*

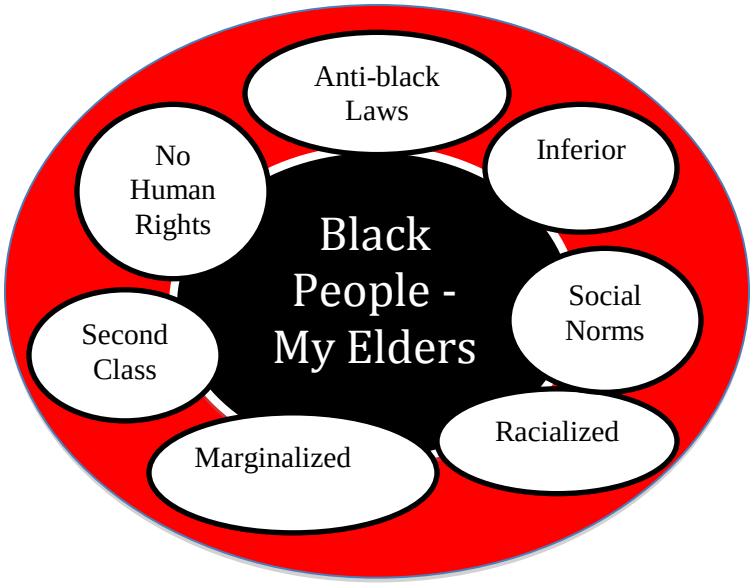
| | |
|---|---|
| **State of Arkansas** | 492 |
| **Counties of Arkansas*** | |
| **Phillips** | 245 |
| **Arkansas** | 18 |
| **Lee** | 15 |
| **Monroe** | 12 |
| **Little River** | 11 |
| **Lonoke** | 11 |
| **Ouachita** | 11 |
| Ashley | 10 |
| Calhoun | 10 |
| Desha | 9 |

* Not all counties are listed

The violence of Jim Crow manifested a brutal kingdom of white supremacy that positioned whiteness as the predator and Black people as the prey. For such a system to be effective at destroying its prey, it must encapsulate and suffocate its target with relentless psychophysiological darts of systemic racism and colonialism.

For my elders, there existed multiple psychophysiological darts of racist whiteness, everyday racism, denied education, economic exploitation, social isolation, and political oppression that produced grievous oppression and realistic death of Black people's humanity. Figure 5.1 illustrates the violence of Jim Crow in action.

*Figure 5.1:* Psychophysiological Darts of Everyday Racism




Ultimately, Jim Crow laws and Black codes denied equality to Black people. This denied equality is reflected in my elders' reminiscences about their experiences with everyday racism and is captured very accurately in the comments made by Chief Taney as cited in *Scott v. Sandford,* 1856:

> They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order…they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect…the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit (p. 407)

This legalized racism echoed throughout the very fibers of my elders' existence. My elders' experiences with everyday racism were structured around oppression, and a life of physical, mental, and emotional enslavement that I refer to as psychophysiological trauma. My elders recount the dehumanizing impact of legal subjugation as part of their everyday existence.

Mrs. White provided one example of dehumanizing subjugation when she spoke about an early childhood memory regarding one of her mother's work responsibilities.

> **White:** She went out the back door with the broom; I thought she was going to sweep the back porch off. She went around to the front porch, swept off the front porch, and then came back around to the back door to come into the house. I couldn't believe it. I never will forget that.

As discussed in Chapter One, Jim Crow regulations were legal strongholds, a series of anti-Black laws that regulated everyday life and interactions between Black and white people. As a child, Mrs. White was directly exposed to how racism was the natural order of business that established a system of racial divide and subjugated existence. Mrs. White witness how Black people were positioned as an inferior race and were not to socialize with white people.

Another example of this racist, oppressive socialization and subjugated existence was captured by my elder, Mr. Johnson, as he reflected on a conversation he had with a white female.

> **Johnson:** Lady said to me one time; I never would've thought I sit down and talk to someone like you.

This exchange between Mr. Johnson and the white lady is an example of the historical racist ideology that structured communal socializing between Black and white people. It was illegal for Black and white people to congregate in any form or manner (Kennedy, 2011; Pilgrim, 2000). The subjugated existence experienced by my elders was an essential tread of impenitent white supremacy that prevailed throughout their lives and dominated every area of their fraught existence.

The prevalence of white supremacy that dominated my elders' life is supported by the CRT tenet that racism is the natural order of business governing power structures and systems of human interactions that go unacknowledged or are blatantly denied making it virtually impossible to confront. As my elders confronted racism in their everyday life as

part of power structures and systems of human interactions, they also endured the social construction of their racial identity, the collateral damage of interest convergence, and the negative impact of being racialized according to political, economic, and social contexts. Comments made by my elders display how their racial identity was socially scripted to sustain the legal doctrine in the United States constitutional law of separate but equal. Ms. Vance and Mr. Thomason spoke about separate spaces for Black people and white people, such as separate drinking fountains, bathrooms, doctors' offices, schooling, and places of worship.

> **Vance**: You didn't go in the doctor's office. They had separate bathrooms, restrooms for Black s and Whites. And they had a sign up there that said colored. Even in the doctor's office it was split up into two sides, a side for the Colored, and a side that the Whites would sit on until they called you to see the doctor. Even as a young child, we didn't think a whole lot about race. I don't know, it's just something about it. You knew white people were in a different section of town….They have separate water fountains downtown, one for whites, and one for Blacks. Blacks couldn't drink out of the water fountain for whites that they had out there. Oh, you learned at a very early age, a very early age, because your people told you even before you could read, probably even before you can speak.
>
> You learned at a very early age. If you wanted some water, as a little kid, I want some water, and you see a white person drinking; your parents would say no you can't drink from there. From that experience, you knew. It doesn't take long to learn when you are young. You learn fast, at a very fast rate. You remember what you learn. We didn't think we could be arrested at the age of 6 or 7, but the police would put you in jail. So, what you do, you protected others. You were very protective of others because you didn't want them to get into trouble. You learned at a very early age. You knew your identity. You knew that you were a Negro at that time. They called you Negro in so many ways. You knew what you could do and what you could not do.
>
> **Thomason**: White students if they wanted to go there they could, but we couldn't go to the white schools. It's just like many whites would always come to Black churches, but Blacks couldn't go to white churches, back in those days.

Ms. Vance's comments are powerful implications of just how race was socially constructed and imposed on Black children. According to Ms. Vance's comments, these imposed racist legal sanctions on Black people were explained to young Black children, pre-toddler years, to protect them from the harmful racist actions of white people. Equally, as Ms. Vance's comments demonstrated the racist social construction of Blackness, Mr. Thomason's comments significantly pointing out how whiteness enforced white superiority concerning socialization among Black people and white people in the church and the school.

According to Mr. Thomason's comments, whites had the authority and power to enter into a Black establishment without concern of protest or fear of retaliation. On the contrary, Black people were legally barred from entering white establishments during the Jim Crow era. This social construction of my elders' race and subjugation of their lives were used as destructive psychophysiological weapons to rule and dominate Black people. Although my elders were not enslaved, their lives were controlled by the American heritage that enslaved Africans, caste and class Africans as inferior, dehumanized Africans, and indentured Africans to a land and place supported and sustained by atrocious physical violence and racist political powers (Dollard, 1988; Kendi, 2016; Kennedy, 2011; Khanna, 2010; Woodward, 1966).

The literature supports that the origins of America's indefensible racist ideologies imposed discriminatory legal sanctions on the lives of people of color (Anderson, 1988; Beaulieu, 1988; Dollard, 1988; Falk et al., 1993; Flora et al., 2015; Goldfield, 1991; Hansan, 2011; Harrington, 1963; Hoelscher, 2003; Iceland, 2013; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Molina, 2014; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Spring, 2016). These legal sanctions were

grounded in forced assimilation, white supremacy, political agendas, derogatory racial scripts, and societal constructs designed to dominate people of color. Essentially, Black people had no civil rights; thus, they had no legal recourse to defend themselves. Mrs. Pighee comments expressed the intersection of race with power and law.

> **Pighee:** The Porter man who was in the old jailhouse years back, they had hung him. Mrs. Holmes son, they say he was trying to court a white woman. He was in prison and they hung him. Back there, yes ma'am, they did some low down things. They had to put up with it.

Mrs. Pighee's comments illustrate how whites used legal force to dominate Black people, and how Black people were powerless to defend themselves. One can infer from Mrs. Pighee's comments that the politically controlled judicial system was not designed to defend Black people, but to uphold white supremacy and the status of white elites while controlling, oppressing, and relegating the lives of Black people to an inferior status.

These systems of domination established a caste system that regulated and defined the lives of my elders as second-class citizens. Frankly, whites were able to disregard and manipulate the law in order to sustain white supremacy because laws were not written in a neutral language or from neutral perspectives (Alexander, 2012; Molina, 2014), but were written from "positioned perspectives" (Bell, 1995, p. 910). These positioned perspectives are vital ingredients of the atrocious legacy of America's enslavement of Black people for profit. From these positioned perspectives, people of color are marginalized and oppressed, and their voices are distorted and silenced.

Nevertheless, my elders learned to cope with their oppressed lives and the vicious racist attack on their humanity by holding firm to their faith and belief in God. Their faith developed into a system of personal and collective agency that they exercised as coping mechanisms. Although not all of my elders spoke about the intersectionality of religion,

race, and mental health, I would be dismissive of my elders' belief in God and God's protection over their lives if I did not honor how Mrs. Pighee, Mrs. Washington, and Mrs. White spoke about the powerful protection of the God they serve.

> **Pighee:** So, when you think about it well, we didn't have freedom like they had. But, when it came down to being able to live and move on in life, we were able to do that because see old, old people always stood on the word of God.
> I got up at 4:00 in the morning making fires and cooking breakfast. Sometimes I look back and wonder. I say Lord, I know you enable me to come through to mother 12 children. And now Henry went to WWII…he turn out to be a alcoholic, but on the end of his life he got better. …It wasn't an easy life, but when you look back on it, you know God brought you through.
>
> **Washington:** My kids use to tell me that the school in this small town of Brinkley didn't prepare them for college. It failed them. But, my kids made it anyways. Thanks be to God.
>
> **White:** Well, I, I know if I hadn't been accepted Christ as my savior, Lord and Savior, I know that I would done kill me somebody and gone to jail and thought nothing of it. Even though being a saved person, you have to really stay on your toes and ask God to order your steps and keep you because you can just – I am telling you.

My elders' used their faith as a coping mechanism to deal with the psychophysiological trauma of the rape of their human dignity and as a weapon of empowerment and personal agency to endure their violent and oppressive existence.

Collectively, systemic racism and the individuals who contribute to its sustainability have deliberately cultivated a mindset and way of life supported by sociopolitical, economic, and legal ramifications that upholds subjugation of Black and Brown people. This legal subjugation is the foundation of white supremacy that not only controlled my elders' daily communal living but also structured their employment, thus, their poverty level and upward mobility.

## Theme Two: Economic Exploitation of Black Labor

Research supports that employment opportunities are linked to the economic development of a community, as well as the financial stability of its residents (Allen-Smith, Wimberley, & Morris, 2000; Falk & Lyson, 1988; Kennedy, 2011; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Wimberley, 2010). Moreover, the literature supports that many Black people living in the rural Black Belt are unable to secure employment that would allow them to move out of poverty (Iceland, 2013; Kennedy, 2011; Lyson & Falk, 1993). Thus, without equitable employment opportunities, Black families residing in rural places are placed at a disadvantage that hinders their ability to improve their circumstances. Historically, during the Jim Crow era, employment opportunities for Black people were limited to sharecropping, domestic work, and or menial manual labor (Kennedy, 2011). My elder Ms. Vance speaks of the lack of employment opportunities for Blacks.

> **Vance**: Well, there were no jobs here for black folks. There are plenty of jobs, but not for us. Certain jobs Black folks just didn't get here. There were no jobs here for Black teenagers to do except for working in the cotton field. That was the main labor, cotton field. That's all we did. We chopped cotton. We picked cotton.

This historical limitation of employment opportunities for Black people was established and maintained by whiteness and white supremacy. Although slavery was outlawed in the late 1860s, it did not end; it evolved. Chattel slavery metamorphosed into a sharecropping system. Slavery and sharecropping share a commonality of indentured servitude of Black people. This indentured servitude involved the exchanged of Black people's labor as a commodity for profit operated by white plantation owners (Falk et al., 1993; Kennedy, 2011). Ms. Vance's comments helped to explain the concept of Black labor as a commodity for white profit.

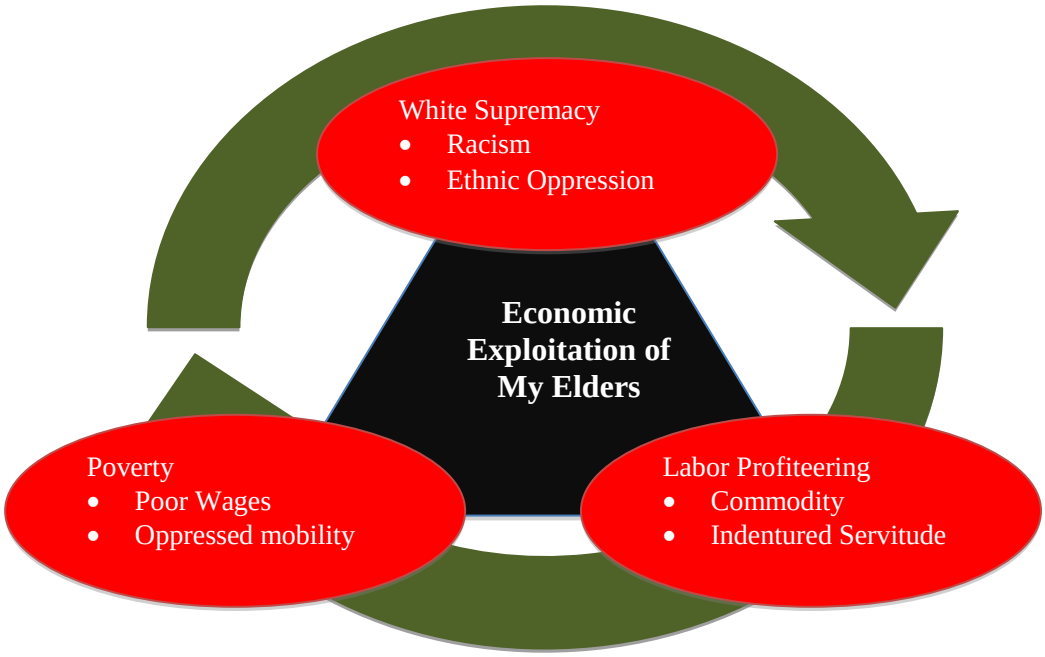
> **Vance**: There were no jobs for us. They had a lot of Blacks who were farmers. They did what you call sharecropping. They never got out of debt. After the crops harvest, you got, supposedly have gotten, a fourth of what was made. But in many cases, they didn't. They didn't get anything. The farmer that you were working for, which was always white, set the prices for your crops.

According to CRT, the dominant white society racializes different minority groups at different times depending on shifting needs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Unfortunately, these shifting needs within the labor market meant that Black people did not have control over their employment opportunities. Without being able to control their employment opportunities, Black people were also unable to negotiate wages, acquire health benefits, establish saving accounts, or plan for a better tomorrow. Life was about day-to-day survival.

> **Vance:** I tell people I was right on the tail end of slavery. To me, it was a source of slavery because when we started, I started working in the field when I was 8 years old, you had to chop all day long up to 10 hours; 10-hour workdays for $2 a day. $2 per day! 10 hours, you got a 30-minute lunch break. Yes, ma'am. That is the kind of life we had.

The powerful influence of money is real. Without sufficient income or the opportunity to earn sufficient income, it is impossible to move out of poverty and to improve one's position in life. Poverty and restrained social mobility were cumulative collateral damages of white supremacy forced upon the lives of Black people through historical social, political, and economic oppression (Alexander, 2012; Anderson, 1988; Beaulieu, 1988; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Harrington, 1963/1981; Iceland, 2013; Lichter, 1989; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Rogers & Weiher, 1986; Wilder, 2014) as illustrated in figure 5.2.

*Figure 5.2:* Economic Exploitation of Black People




Unfortunately, these collateral damages have inflicted the socioeconomic advancement of Black people across and within multiple generations. Ms. Vance and Mrs. Washington speak about the hard lives of their parents and grandparents.

> **Vance**: I talked with my grandparents, they had it harder than I did. Their parents had it harder than they did. My grandmother was born, I think 1895. Her husband, grandpa, I remember was born in 1886. So, my grandmother, I think her mother was probably born, might have been born in slavery, on the tail end of slavery. I do know that great-grandmother was a slave.
>
> **Washington**: It was tougher for some families because they didn't have the money. Because my parents were sharecroppers; they had to get them crops out to make a little money, just enough to live on, barely.

Black people living in the rural South have historically suffered from high rates of poverty due to systemic racism and oppression (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Dudenhefer, 1993; Falk et al., 1993; Ford, 1996; Iceland, 2013; Walker, 1996). Living in

poverty produces multiple obstacles for individuals. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, social isolation, limited mobility, limited access to equitable educational opportunities and physical and mental healthcare, increase in mortality rates, and competition for limited resources (Iceland, 2013). Moreover, these obstacles have an acute impact on how individuals connect to their communities.

My elders' community was created and sustained by a caste and class system (Dollard, 1937; Falk et al., 1993; Kendi, 2016). According to Dollard (1937), "caste and class distinctions" are not only "ways of dividing people according to the behavior expected of them in a society," but also an indication of the "relations in which people stand to one another " (p. 61). The American caste and class system, its society and heritage, has been baptized in the blood of racism and white bigotry. Moreover, this American racist caste and class system has positioned the Black person as the "other" American; barred from humanity (Alexander, 2012; Anderson, 1988, Beaulieu, 1988; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Dollard, 1988; Goldfield, 1991; Harrington, 1963; Wilder, 2014).

Racism and discriminatory practices and statutes against Black people in the rural southern United States have historically contributed to established social inequalities, and enhanced social isolation. This social isolation is detrimental to the livelihood of Black people living in the rural South. Such isolation results in limited resources, economic deficits including low-wage employment and poverty, inadequate public infrastructures, poor physical and mental health facilities, lack of political representation, and second-class education (Beaulieu, 1988; Dollard, 1937; Flora et al., 2015; Spring, 2016).

### Theme Three: Denied Equitable Education

The historical representation of denied education of African Americans is prolific and well documented (Alexander, 2012; Anderson, 1988; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2014; Bullock, 1967; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Dollard, 1988; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Goldfield, 1991; Hansan, 2011; Harrington, 1963; Horsford, 2011; Molina, 2014; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilder, 2014). This history of Black education within the Black Belt rural South is essential to understanding the politics and ideologies that framed Black education and educational institutions. The literature elucidates that enslaved Black people were legally barred from learning to read and to write, and that physical violence was used to discourage Black people from becoming literate (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Walker, 1996). This level of denied education was supported and controlled by many whites, but more specifically, white planters. White planters controlled the political, economic, and social contexts of the rural South (Goldfield, 1990; Dollard, 1937/1988; Harrington, 1963). What is more, white planters' resistance was able to halt the advancement of Black education in the late 1800s by imposing coercive labor, restrictive mobility, and reducing wages (Anderson, 1988). Additionally, many whites were not in favor of public education or any education for enslaved and/or freed Black people. They feared that if Black people learned to read and to write they would rebel (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967; Spring, 2016).

The institution of education was racially, politically, and socially constructed by those in positions of privilege, mainly white males. This racially, politically, and socially constructed education was engrossed in a "patriarchal, Eurocentric society" and immersed in massive forms of oppression (Patel, 2016, p.11). Racial analysis of the

plight of students of color in educational settings provides a clear explanation of racist educational barriers, challenges Eurocentric ideologies, and interrogates the dominant narrative of white supremacy (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). My elders' recollection of their educational experiences illustrates how whites sought to script education in economic and racial contexts to exclude Black people from receiving an equitable education.

> **White:** We couldn't go to school like the other kids. We had to go like when it wasn't no time to chop cotton or no time to pick cotton, you know like that. We had to go in the seasons. I thought and I still think I would have been a, I don't know what, but I would have been an educated person if I would have had the chance to go to school.
>
> **Washington:** They learned a lot in the Black school, more in the Black school than they did in the mix schools with them. Because in the white school, they don't teach you. If you don't help yourself, they not going to help you. You have to get your own lesson. They just sit there and look at you and send a bad grade home.
>
> **Ms. Vance:** We never got the latest edition of a textbook; after they got a new edition from Brinkley High School, they send them on over to the Black school and that is what they did. So, a lot of the information we got was old information, outdated. We were always behind.
>
> **Thomason:** When there were new desks, the white schools got them. The Black school got the hand-me-down desks, got the hand-me-down books.

My elders' comments illustrate that education for Black students was not a priority for white educators. As well, Black schools lacked adequate resources, and Black students were not provided an equitable education. My elders' experiences support that white educators ignored the separate but equal doctrine. According to the paramount case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court declared that it was legal for facilities to be racially separate if such facilities were equal. Well, equal is a relative term, thus, open for interpretation and implementation.

The literature supports that education and education reform is grounded in historical, political, and legal contexts that sustain systemic racism and white supremacy (Ahmed, 2012; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Delpit, 2006; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Tyack, 1974; Valenzuela, 1999; Wilder, 2014). Comments made by Mrs. Pighee and Mr. Thomason highlights the sentiment of some whites regarding education for Blacks.

> **Pighee:** I know Jimmy Goodson he told Ms. Reed ain't no need you sending them boys to school ain't gonna do no good. She say my boys is going to school. Every one of them graduated from high school and some of them from college. She could have given up. See he wanted to keep them out there on the farm.
>
> **Thomason:** The school for white students went to the 12th grade. A lot of the reasons why Black schools in the rural areas didn't go to the 12th grade was to keep you on the farm. If you didn't have an education, you couldn't progress. They needed hands. So, one way to keep them in the fields is to don't educated them; they don't need it. That was the attitude about some of it.

Mrs. Pighee and Mr. Thomason's comments emphasize two critical aspects of Black education: interest convergence and a selective opportunity to attend high school. It appears that whites favored education for Black if it did not interfere with their profits. CRT identifies this sentiment as interest convergence. Interest convergence is best understood as the behavior of whites who engage in social justice only when doing so does not require an alteration in their unearned privileged status and or doing so benefits, be it social, political, and or economical, their quality of life (Anderson, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2017; Harris, 1993; Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2000).

The second critical point extracted from Mrs. Pighee and Mr. Thomason's counter stories is that education beyond the eighth grade was restricted racially and economically.

Mr. Thomason's comments exemplify that education for Black students in their community did not include a high school education; conversely, white students were able to obtain a high school education. Particularly, whites did not support education for Black students beyond the eighth grade. However, as pointed out by my elders' comments, some Black families were able to secure a high school education for their children. If families were able to pay the tuition to send their children to church-sponsored schools, then Black students could complete high school. Additional comments made by Mrs. Pighee and Mr. Thomason supports this statement:

> **Pighee**: We would go to the CWR district association. We went there one year and then we went over to the public school because our parents weren't able to pay for us to go over there.
>
> **Thomason**: The Brinkley Academy, also called The Consolidated White River Academy, which was a church school, it was the only school in Brinkley that Black students could finish high school.

The history of Black education within the Black Belt rural south is essential to understanding the politics and ideologies that framed Black education and educational institutions. The sociopolitical and economic ties to education for Black people in the rural south were controlled by white planters, politicians, and educators who were more concerned about maintaining the status quo and their profits. Whites, those in positions of power and laypersons alike, were not so keen on Black people receiving an education. Nevertheless, early Black schools were supported and established by the desire and efforts of enslaved and freed Black people to support their emancipation and, ultimately, to have control over their own lives. Here is what my elders had to say about Black education.

> **Pighee:** I attended all Black school. Yes, ma'am, all Black. Never was with white people. Now them old teachers they were strict teachers, yes,

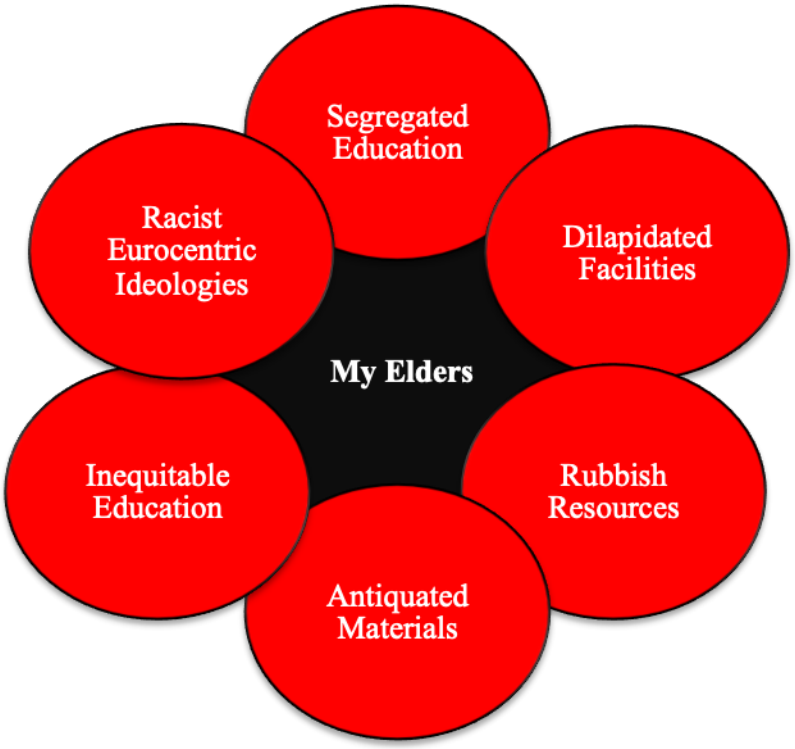
sir. Couldn't talk in class. No, child. Them teachers had control back there I can tell ya.

**Washington:** Well, for one thing the teachers at that time tired to help motivate you to go further and stuff." "Education was very important. I had a teacher, she was no higher than 13, she was 13 years old when she started. She was a good teacher. When school was out, she went to Philander Smith College and got a degree. She then came back to help. That little old room; it's about 13 or 14 of us in that one room. It wasn't section off. The teacher would teach each row, this one and that one. She had it in order. She kept the children quite. They weren't rowdy or nothing. Cause all she had to do was write a note and send it home to the parents.

**Vance:** One of the things that helped us was our teachers. They told us things that were not in the textbook because they knew what we needed. They taught us about survival. How to survive in the world that we were living because, I always say, we are on the tail end of slavery. Our teachers had already told us what we were going to be coming up against. They told us all you need is two things, determination, and dedication. They told us it was not going to be easy, but you can do it". They let us know, you don't want to be in the cotton field all your life.

The long struggle over education reform experienced many trials, tribulations, and victories. Whites fought to convince Black people that their conception of education was the natural order of things. This white perception of Black education was founded on sociopolitical and economic ideologies that created a system of second-class education for my elders. Figure 5.3 demonstrates the political and economic forces of legal subordination that sustained this second-class education system.

*Figure 5.3*: Denied Education




A critical evaluation of the educational experiences of my elders in the rural southern Black belt reveals a well-crafted conspiracy to repress Black education or racially script Black education to present a deficit narrative regarding Blacks' determination for education and intellectual abilities. My elders' counter storytelling regarding their educational experiences and the historical, educational climate of the time, supports that education for Black people was grounded in historical, political, and legal contexts sustaining racial and class systems of systemic racism and white supremacy.

### Theme Four: Sociopolitical Constructing of Racial Identity

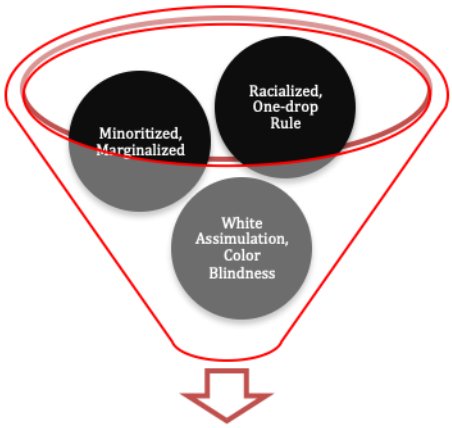
Race is a sociopolitical construct (Haney-Lopez, 1994), not an objective or scientific trait. Thus, race is fluid and not a fixed identity or personal identifier. Irrespectively, minoritized groups are racialized according to political, economic, and social contexts (Akintunde, 1999; Cameron & Wycoff, 1998; Chang, 2016; Delgado, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney-Lopez, 2006; Takaki, 2012; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). My elders speak about how they were racially categorized and how their proposed racial identity was used as a socioeconomic tool of marginalization and oppression.

> **Vance:** What did they call us at that time, Negroes? You knew that because when you went to school for one thing you had your textbook there, they write your name down and they put down you Negro. That is what they write in the book. Yes!
>
> **Washington:** I say I am African American, but I am really not. So, I identity myself, but I don't ever tell nobody that I Indian. The people of this town identify me as different. My parents always, because they was a little scared, so they always would say, Negro or colored. Right, because while I was growing up you couldn't say what you are. They tell you what you are.
>
> **Pighee:** I got some people out in Tennessee that look like white folks. Somewhere down the line, a white man had to produce a child by some of my peoples and it come on up through the third and fourth generation. You know they began to rank up quicker then a natural black person. A natural black person don't rank up real quick. I began to rank up. That is how I learn about these colors. I say now white man got some back there probably great grandmother. They tell me they use to go by the man's house and the black man would come out and they go in there and use his wife. They've done some dirty things. They don't want to turn that a loose. Yeah, that's how these colors come about.
>
> **White:** I guess when I first realize I was Black I guess I was probably 7 or 8 years old, when they kept on talking about colored. It could have been when my mother had to go round that porch, go out the back door. I just couldn't figure just how my parents would put up with that. They were grown people. They didn't have no other chose. Now that I know, you

> know. But they didn't have no other chose because they would end up killing the husband and dragging him away, leaving momma with 10 or 12 kids; it didn't make them no difference how many kids you had. So, they didn't have no other chose, back then.

The foundation of using race as a socioeconomic tool of marginalization and oppression was established before my elders' lifetime. The infamous Supreme Court cases, *Plessy .v Ferguson,* (1896*); Dred Scott v. Sandford,* (1857); and *Loving v. Virginia,* (1967) and the abominable one-drop rule helped to solidify racist ideology that racialized minoritized groups across time and according to political, economic, and social contexts (Bullock, 1967; Haney-Lopez, 1994; Molina, 2014). Critical scholars Molina (2014) and Delgado and Stefancic (2012) support the ideology that people of color are racialized across time and in comparison to other groups. According to Molina (2014), "Race is socially constructed in relational ways, that is, in correspondence to other groups" (p. 3). In other words, race is categorically defined in social and political situations connecting and assessing individuals in comparison to established dominant racial scripts as depicted in figure 5.4. Furthermore, CRT posits that racial formation is adaptable and influenced by racist ideologies. These racist ideologies are based on white assimilation.

*Figure 5.4*: Sociopolitical Constructing of Racial Identity




Interestingly, some individuals believe that if you work hard enough, get a good education, and be a productive and contributing citizen of society; you can accomplish whatever you desire. This socially constructed philosophy of white assimilation is the foundation of the American Dream. This philosophy is accurate for some individuals, mainly white heterosexual men and women; but for individuals who have been historically racialized, marginalized, and ostracized, such as me and my elders, this American Dream has been nothing more than an everlasting American nightmare of endless white supremacy, systemic racism, and bureaucratic inequalities. This notion of white assimilation supports color-blindness.

Profoundly, the Supreme Court upholds color blindness by maintaining that it is "wrong for the law to take note of race, even to remedy a historical wrong" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 26). Color-blindness serves to marginalize Black people while at the same time promoting racism and white supremacy. Using color-blindness rhetoric allows whites to feel conscious irresponsible for the hardships Black people endured daily. Perplexingly, even two of my elders fell victim to color-blindness.

> **Thomason:** How do I racially identify? I don't see race. When you are in a business, you can't afford to see race. I tell ya being in the store, our best

> customers were the white people. You learn at an early age that, well, they always taught us be nice to everybody, this was before we got into the store. When we got in the store, you just naturally nice to people. They got along with us and that helped us. They would do things for us, unbelievable.
>
> **Johnson:** I am an African American Black man. Even though racial segregation, I was more prepared than some. It didn't affect me as much because you know I was pretty much raised by a white man. I didn't see white and black.

My elders' color-blindness is best explained as a psychophysiological response to oppression and subjugation and a reflex of the human instinct to survive. This survival is explained by reviewing the atrocious historical American legacy of the enslavement of Black people's bodies and minds. This legacy meant that every aspect of my elders' lives was controlled by white society and a white legal system. For, during the historical time in which my elders lived, they had no civil rights. To survive, my elders behaved passive-aggressively so as not to upset whites, knowing and staying in their place. Behaving passive-aggressively meant saying yes, sir and yes, ma'am while at the same time stealthily and brazenly fighting for your humanity.

Furthermore, the vile oppressive nature of white supremacy and Jim Crow psychologically emasculated Mr. Johnson and Mr. Thomason's identity as Black men. This psychologically emasculation is the result of denied civil rights and the violent control of their livelihoods. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Thomason's lives as Black men were manipulated and defined by racialized scripts created and sustained by systemic racism. My elders' mentality about what it meant to be a Black man was framed and sustained within the lens of colonialism. Intriguingly, it appears unbeknown to my elders that they were striped of their power and confidence through subjugation. According to my elders' comments, being kind to white people and being reared by a white granddad provided

them with protection and privileges. However, even though my elders stated that they did not see color, their comments about racial segregation, their rights and livelihood, and access to things, betray them.

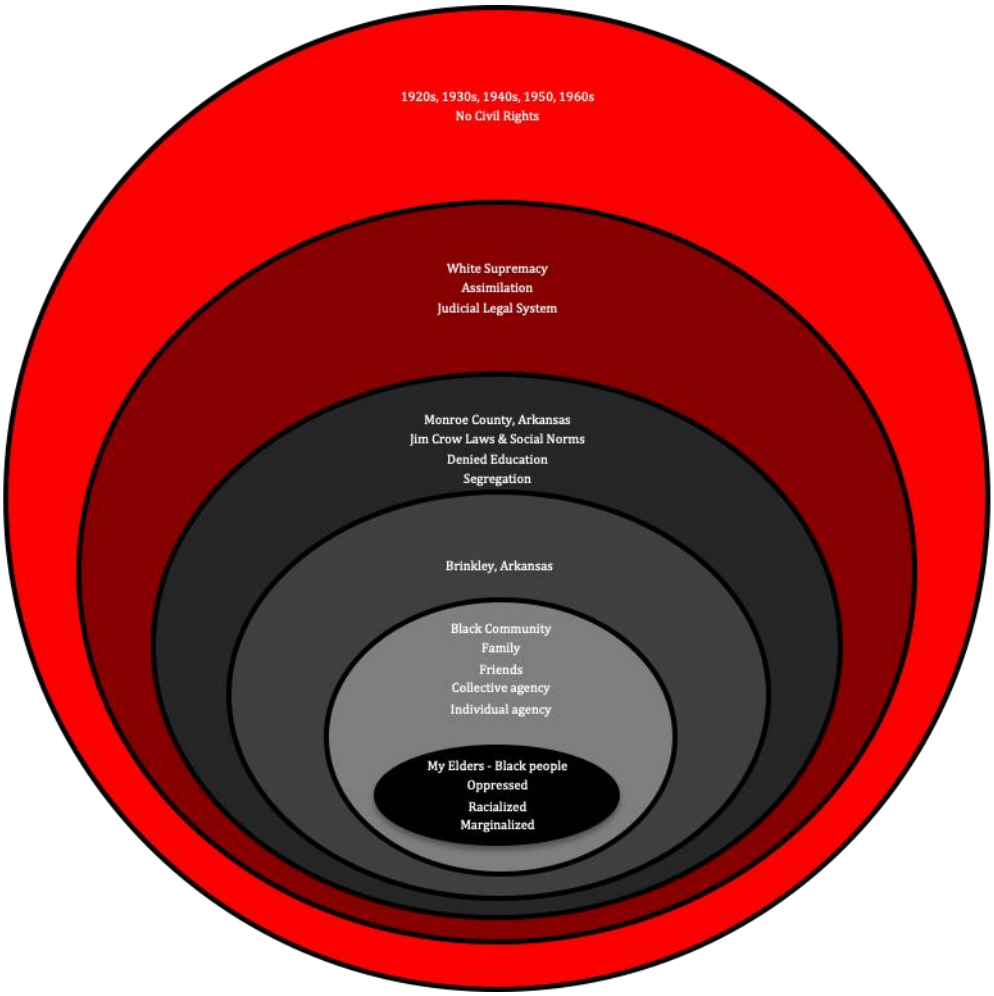
> **Thomason:** My education experience, considering the times, they were great. They were not what they, an experience would be today because at that particular time we did not have access to many of the things that the white schools had and the things that we got was hand-me-downs so to speak. The community was sort of separate those days you know what I mean because of racial segregation.
>
> **Johnson:** Because of color, so many different obstacles that they have to come over to accomplish what they might have in mind. We didn't have the same rights back there.

My elders spoke about how their racial identities were established before they were born by sociopolitical and economic factors. White society racialized Black people into socially, economically, and politically constructs to appease their need to maintain their position and status. According to Molina (2014), whiteness is best understood in relation to non-white groups. White is a hierarchical category with specific rankings, Anglo-Saxons in the first positions; Celts, Slavs, Jews, and Mediterranean below Anglo-Saxons; and Mexicans, Indians, and Black people on the bottom of the hierarchical ladder. Furthermore, dominant racial scripts, legal validation, and whitewash connect "racialized groups" (p. 6) across time and space imposing prescribed socialization principles upon groups. The hidden power of these racial scripts and the intersectionality of race, power, and the law are involved each time racial scripts are enforced on groups and or individuals (p. 7). The intersectionality of my elders' race with power and law was illustrated throughout the elaborate details of my elders' narratives regarding their lived experiences and educational journeys.

The system of white supremacy became increasingly infallible the longer it was sustained and maintained by legal sociopolitical and economic contexts. These legal sociopolitical and economic contexts are insidious systems of oppression, and often begin as covert ideas that evolve into overt divisive mechanisms. Overt divisive mechanisms become powerful tools of oppression ingrained in the persona of all involved. The more powerful these tools of oppression became, the easier they are entrenched within everyday ideology and life. Before we know it, we have become colonialized. For my elders, these powerful tools of everyday oppression were centered around denied education, economic exploitation, and racialized identity. My elders' struggles were multidimensional and substantial. My elders were denied the opportunity to decide if their lives were worthy of equity and justice. Instead, white supremacy determined the value of their lives based on white privilege.

Furthermore, my elders' struggles were multidimensional and substantial. I agree with the quote by Audre Lorde, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (as cited in Johnson & Miller, 2015, p. 4). Thus, using an ecological model, I captured how my elders' intersecting forms of oppression reframed their existence and demonstrated how they lived within the racist system of Jim Crow. Figure 5.5 illustrates and supports that my elders' lives were enveloped in whiteness and systemic racism.

*Figure 5.5*: Intersecting Forms of Oppression




| | |
|---|---|
| | Black Community: Family & Friends, daily and social interactions |

| | |
|---|---|
|  | Level 2 = Brinkley, Arkansas: Connections/interactions people and place |
|  | Level 3 = Monroe County, Arkansas: Institutions and organizations in a community |
|  | Level 4 = White Supremacy: Features of broader society |
|  | Level 5 = Sociohistorical context: time and events |

What is this whiteness? Whiteness is an ideology grounded in a force of assimilation, capitalism, and cultural homogeneity (Alexander, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; DiAngelo, 2011; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Molina, 2014). However, whiteness is powerless without a target of oppression, people of color, more specifically, Black people. Thus, the lives of my elders are at the heart of this system, the target of whiteness. For you see, whiteness allow for the lives of white people to be enriched by stolen profitable opportunities for quality education, housing, employment, healthcare, and simple life pleasures. These stolen profitable opportunities were created by violently forced enslavement of Black people. The physical strength of Black bodies was forced to build a system of white capitalism that ultimately excluded Black people.

Furthermore, whiteness has the audacity to proclaim that the misfortunates of Black people's opportunities are because Black people do not try hard enough, are lazy, or do not have the mental ability to achieve; thus, Black people need whiteness to save them from themselves. Thus, what is more common for white people is to position themselves to assist people of color to be more like them, because after all, according to the foundation of white supremacy, success and will is an individual process with no ties to systemic inequalities or racial hierarchies (McIntosh, 1988). This position allows whites to enjoy white privilege and blame the collateral damages birthed out of white

privilege on people of color. Bonilla-Silva (2014) captured this notion when he referred to the United States postindustrial social and economic changes of the 1950s and 1960s laissez-faire racist ideology that blamed black people for their economic conditions (p. 7). Ultimately, the success of whiteness is depended upon containing and suppressing the lives of Black people. This devilish whiteness is the key principle to white supremacy; the founding fiber of American society.

## Conclusion

My elders, who identify as Negro, Colored, and or African American, lived and survived racism as the natural order of life. In addition, they dealt face-to-face with white people who denied their humanity and applauded equality if it profited them but denied equitable access to opportunities. Furthermore, my elders withstood the continuous sociopolitical construction of their race through legal sanctions that profited from the intersectionality of their race with power and law. These legal sanctions included but were not limited to Black Codes, Jim Crow, the slavery manifesto, and Supreme Court rulings (i.e., *Plessy v. Ferguson,* 1896; *Dred Scott v. Sandford,* 1857*; Loving v. Virginia,* 1967), all of which positioned my elders as second-class citizens.

Although my elders do not know Critical Race Theory, CRT validates their narratives and their narratives fortify the tenets of CRT. For you see, racism was an everyday phenomenon my elders experienced as residents of rural Southern America. My elders were reared, lived, and reproduced in the southern United States during and under the atrocious legacy of Jim Crow. They came to understand "what" they were, Black, by understanding who they were not, White. This understanding produced a Black

frame of reference and worldview of their lives and the historical period that influenced and shaped their existence. Their frames of reference and worldviews were created and sustained by the sociopolitical construction of their race.

# CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

## DiAnna's Reflection

What I thought was going to be an easy journey down memory lane with my elders, turned out to be a painstaking journey uncovering the evils of systemic racism. Ultimately, because my elders fought against grave racist injustices and violent white rage, I exist; I have a voice; I have civil rights.

## Barren Hope

I BELIEVE

I have HOPE

in the concept that ALL PEOPLE ARE CREATED EQUAL;

However,

My belief and hope for equality is barren.

I am TORMENTED by the actions of white men, white women, white organizations, and white society that

ENSLAVES, KILLS, RAPES, STEALS, and DENIES

the humanity of Black people.

The fruit of my belief and my hope in the concept that ALL PEOPLE ARE CREATED EQUAL has produce BARREN HUMANITY.

As hard as I might try, I cannot give LIFE to a lifeless ideal.

Nevertheless,

I CONTINUE TO PRESS ON

For my elders, the pre-civil rights south was a dangerous time where racist laws and social norms hegemonized their lives. My elders were considered property to be used and disposed of at the will of white society. They had no rights or legal protection, and their very existence was always in a state of fluctuation, uncertainty, and oppression. My elders were silenced, ostracized, racialized, and marginalized, while living under the oppression of Jim Crow. Notwithstanding, their life stories live.

Storytelling and oral histories focus research and provide a comprehensive exploration of how people of color lived with oppression within historical and contemporary contexts. As we examined the origins of America's morally indefensible racist ideologies, which imposed inequalities, disparities, and discriminatory sanctions on the lives of my elders, we found that these ideologies were grounded in forced assimilation, political agendas perpetuating white supremacy, derogatory racial scripts, and societal constructs designed to control the lives of my elders. Furthermore, storytelling and oral histories connect individuals to time, space, events, and peoples. Storytelling and oral histories yield life to experiences, power to expressions, and sway to historical phenomena. The exploration of my elders' oral histories is a step in the right direction.

This chapter provides a discussion of the four themes from Chapter Five. The synthesized results are summarized in three key headings, racist place, sociopolitical oppression, and inequitable education. These three headings were constructed based on my review of the study's findings. Following the discussion of results, research implications are explored and future research suggestions are presented. The chapter culminates with concluding thoughts.

## What Does It All Mean

The literature supports that the limited research regarding the lives of Black people who resided in the rural South during the Jim Crow era is a surprise for three reasons. First, the Black population was a rural population historically located in the southern regions of the United States (Beaulieu, 1988; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Falk et al., 1993; Goldfield, 1991; Lichter, 1989; Lyson & Falk, 1993; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Shapley, 2015; Wilkerson, 2011; Wimberley, 2008). Second, poverty rates for rural southern Black people represent the poorest regions in American society (Beaulieu, 1988; Durant & Knowlton, 1978; Harrington, 1963; Lichter, 1989; Rogers & Weiher, 1986). Finally, the intersectionality of place, race, and education have been a deadly collision for Black people (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1976; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2005; Wilder, 2014; Wilkerson, 2011). Considering these three facts, there should exist robust research exploring the plight of Black people who reside in the southern United States.

According to Lichter (1989), the lack of rural research is contributed to the notion that rural Black people are more spatially dispersed, thus less visible, and easier to ignore. Furthermore, Books (1997) and Dudenhefer (1993) indicated that the lack of rural research regarding the lived experiences of Black people and rural poverty is overshadowed by a fixation on urban issues and crises. Thus, this phenomenological critical race study was designed to explore the lived experiences and educational journeys of six African Americans, whom I refer to as my elders, who lived through the Jim Crow era as residents of a small rural southern community located in the Black Belt's Delta region of Monroe County, Arkansas. My elders did not join the great northern migration (Wilkerson, 2010) of Black folks from southern soil to northern lands. They stayed. In my response to learning deeply about their exceptions, I used Critical Race Theory to find meaning in my elders' counter stories that provided a critical evaluation of my elders' lived experiences and educational journeys as forgotten people in an invisible place.

**Troubled Waters**

No one asked me for my opinion about how I wish to be seen or treated.

I am suppose to just sit in and with white oppression of my humanity.

I am baptized in the chaos of white rage – a rage that has ravaged my consciousness with deadly falsehoods about me, my life, my potential, my very existence - a rage that has tried to erase my history.

I stand in troubled waters waiting on the calm, peace of reconciliation.

Chills take over my body as I STAND within the violent trouble-ness of whiteness.

MY SOUL ACHES

MY BODY SHIVERS

I hold fast to my faith – a faith passed down from generation to generation. This faith is my fortitude. My fortitude to stand against the violent and vilely white supremacy is sustained by personal and collective agency –

I stand on the shoulders of all the Black souls that went before me.

I stand!

I wait!

I stay!

**Racist Place**

There are many margins to the forgotten place and invisible people of the rural south. This region is home to my elders whose ancestry included enslavement, physical violence, denied rights, segregation, and emancipation. The lives of my elders who inhabited this region were linked to the historical, American legacy of racism. This American legacy enslaved Africans, cast and classed my elders as inferior humans, dehumanized my elders, and indentured my elders to a land supported and sustained by white supremacy, and racist political powers.

As the literature emphasized (Hutchinson, 2004), place holds meaning for individuals and is a reality that is informed and constructed by historical events; social, political, and economic contexts; and unique individual experiences. Thus, the Black Belt is a significant place for Black folks. It is the place and the land where my elders lived; where their families were born, reared, and died. My elders' historical ties to the rural southern soil are forever linked to horrific acts of racial violence and oppression.

Although thousands of Black people migrated to northern urban regions in search of freedom and better opportunities, many thousands of Black people remained in the Black Belt. My elders are amongst the thousands of Black people who did not join the great northern migration (Wilkerson, 2011). My elder's oral histories described their lived experiences and educational journeys during the Jim Crow era while residing in the small rural community of Brinkley, Arkansas. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Delgado and Stefancic (2012), the narratives of Black people, a historically minoritized and oppressed group, are essential to confronting and deconstructing systemic racism and inequalities.

According to my elders' narratives, Brinkley, Arkansas, was a place where racist regimes controlled their lives and educational journeys. Jim Crow norms and laws that supported and sustained a system of white superiority through the subjugation of the Black population controlled my elders' lives. For my elders, the historical landscape of Brinkley, Arkansas, produced a level of racism that was ingrained in the daily fibers of everyday living. The racist, historical landscape of Brinkley, Arkansas was manifested through racist racial and legal regimes that made it harder to identify racism, thus, difficult to address.

These historical racist racial and legal regimes meant that separate and unequal regulations controlled black lives, including, but not limited to Supreme Court ruling and Jim Crow laws (Hansen, 2011). The precedent set forth by *Scott v. Sandford* (1856) and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) sustained the separate but equal doctrine that stated separate facilities for the races were constitutional as long as the facilities were substantially equal. The Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment extended equality only

as far as political and civil rights, not social rights. Thus, Black people were legally mandated not to occupy the same spaces as whites. My elders made several comments regarding legalized separate facilities (i.e., bathrooms, water fountains, waiting rooms) for Black people and white people. Additionally, a racist economic system controlled my elders' means of providing for their families.

This racist economic system of Brinkley, Arkansas, birthed from enslavement and free labor of Black people, maintained Black labor as a commodity for white profit. White society relegated the employment of Black people to servitude. These legal sanctions positioned Black people as an inferior race to be manipulated, controlled, and subjugated. The positionality of my elders under Jim Crow rule was condemned to an inferior status.

## Sociopolitical Oppression

The tone of the rural south is set in the contexts of slavery, sharecropping or land tenancy, and Jim Crow. These racist contexts set the region apart from the rest of the nation. Slavery set the south on a destructive path of development that conditioned all aspects of its economy, political, and social life. Although slavery was outlawed in the late 1860s, it did not end; it evolved. Chattel slavery metamorphosed into a sharecropping system (Falk et al., 1993).

The institutions of slavery and sharecropping share a commonality of indentured servitude of Black people. This indentured servitude involved the exchanged of Black's labor as a commodity for profit operated by white plantation owners (Falk et al., 1993). The southern United States was set on a course of development shaped and influenced by a slavery regime that created and sustained a historical legacy of socioeconomic

perplexities and discriminatory legal statutes that would negatively affect generations of Black people, and impede southern rural development and policies (Beaulieu, 1988).

My elders were born and lived during an era of raw racist ideology that imposed discriminatory sanctions on every aspect of their lives. They were denied civil rights, their voices were silenced, and their humanity was denied and oppressed. They lived under the pervasive and violent cloud of white supremacy. A system of racist whiteness and white privilege subjugated Black people to a positionality of inferiority and second-class citizenship. My elders endured the harsh reality of living in Black skin in a racist controlled white society that was created and sustained by vast legal sanctions upheld by the United States Supreme Court; a justice system that supposedly provided equal justice to all.

According to the historical time, in which my elders were born and lived, they were subjected to separate but equal facilities. Consequently, my elders were denied the right to vote; were stripped of legal protection from the racist and violent treatment of white people and a white society; were relegated to menial work, hard labor, and sharecropping; and were impoverished by a system of denied opportunities and freedom to strive for a better life. Overall, my elders' were treated as property to be used, sold, controlled, and discharged at the whims of white people and a racist white society.

Black people were considered a commodity to be used by white people and white society for white profit. Black people had graduated from being counted as enslaved property for white man's profit to being counted as free labor or indentured servants to be used for producing white man's profit. In the eyes of white society, Black people were not seen or valued as human beings. Instead, white society viewed Black people as

subjects of interest. Subjects to be exploited for the sole purpose of maintaining whiteness, which is a foundational element of white supremacy. My elders' narratives about their lived experiences included being subjugated to a positionality of inferiority, being denied the freedom to choose, being denied the freedom to socialized as they so desired, being denied employment and education opportunities, being denied their humanity; ultimately, being controlled and silenced by racist sociopolitical and legal sanctions.

According to Dollard (1937), "caste and class distinctions" are not only "ways of dividing people according to the behavior expected of them in society," but also an indication of the "relations in which people stand to one another " (p. 61). The American caste, its society, and heritage, has been baptized in the blood of racism and white bigotry. The American social class is based on wealth, education, political office, military rank, or other personal accomplishments (Dollard, 1937). This American caste and class systems positioned my elders as the "other" American; barred from humanity.

Racism and discriminatory practices and statutes against Black people in the rural southern United States have historically contributed to social inequalities and isolation. Social inequalities and isolation are detrimental to the livelihood of Black people living in the rural south. Such inequalities and isolation result in limited resources, economic deficits including low-wage employment and poverty, inadequate physical and mental health facilities, lack of political representation, and second-class education (Beaulieu, 1988; Dollard, 1937; Flora et al., 2015; Spring, 2016).

## Inequitable Education

Education was supposed to be the great equalizer. However, the education of my elders, who lived in the rural Black Belt Delta Region of Arkansas during legal segregation, was dictated by racist historical and political contexts. These racist historical and political contexts were plagued with grievous calamities of grave injustices and denied education opportunities for Black and Brown people.

Examining the historical heritage of the rural Black Belt Delta Region is essential to understanding the politics and ideologies that framed Black education. Smith (1999) encourages us to engage critically in a robust decolonized evaluation of how a story is created, scripted, and sustained when the humanity of historically, racialized and minoritized individuals is the focus of the story. During my elders' lifetime as residents of Brinkley, Arkansas, their lives and educational opportunities were defined and constructed through the lens of white supremacy. The system of white supremacy established and upheld a racist ideology that profoundly influenced and shaped my elders' livelihood and limited my elders' educational opportunities. Accordingly, Smith (1999) encouraged educators to situate research and the evaluation of a phenomenon, in this case, education, within historical, sociopolitical, and economic contexts to examine the critical nature of the phenomenon.

## Implications

Racist ideologies, legalized systemic racism, and discriminatory political regimes are the foundational pillars that established the American education system. Patel (2016) pointed out that the institution of education is not racially and culturally neutral or equitable. The institution of education was constructed culturally and socially with a specific purpose determined and established by those in a position of privilege, mainly

white male Eurocentric aristocrats. This foundation of education was engrossed in a "patriarchal, Eurocentric society" and immersed in massive forms of oppression (p.11). Ergo, if we are serious about creating and sustaining an education revolution that addresses the real purpose of education, we must engage in dialectical thinking and critical conversations, and embrace a critical and essential transformation and liberation of our socially constructed paradigms and pedagogy (Boggs & Kurashige, 2011; Freire, 1993).

Furthermore, education reformers cannot expect historically marginalized, racialized, and ostracized students to thrive in the current education systems unless there are significant systemic changes. These systemic changes should confront the deficit thinking held by educators regarding marginalized students, work to eliminate the negative impact of anti-black paradigms and racist federal and state policies, provide an equitable opportunity to learn for historically marginalized students, and explore and critically analyze systemic discriminatory practices contributing to the negative educational consequences that heavily encumber historically marginalized students.

To provide an equitable opportunity to learn for historically marginalized students, researchers and educators must acknowledge and understand the legal and historical systemic disparities inherited within education. In addition, researchers and educators must explore and critically analyze other systemic discriminatory practices contributing to the negative educational consequences often charged to, and that heavily encumbers historically marginalized students. Education and education reform is grounded in historical and political contexts sustaining racial and class systems by systemic racism and white supremacy. Who is deemed worthy of an education, what

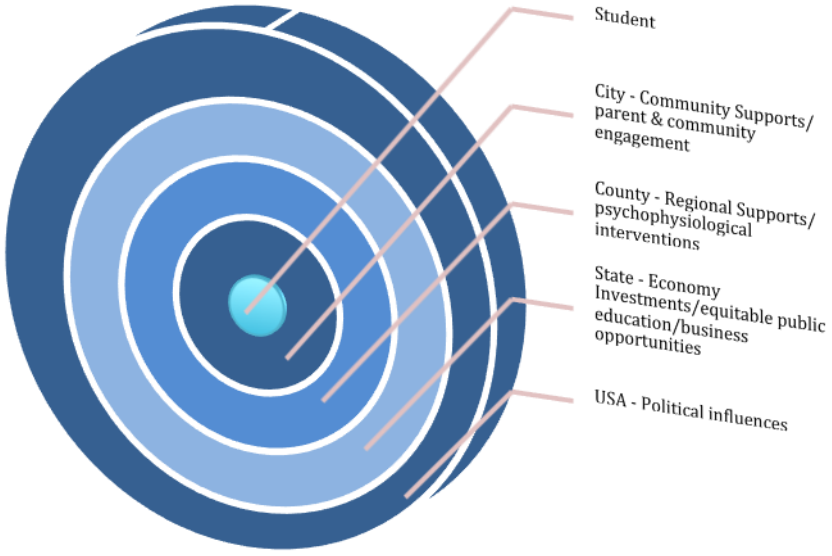
educational resources should be allocated to specific groups of individuals, and how to attract, hire, and retain qualified teachers are just a few questions guiding the debate about what to do about the supposedly failing public education system.

Churchill (2016) exclaimed that we must move beyond the simplistic and futile notion of applying a general change in the perspectives of "Eurocentrism's legacy" (p. 27). Instead, there must be an annihilation of the white supremacy structure of education systems and the creation of a collaborative education system. This annihilation starts with the creation of collaborative and ecological equitable education systems that empower the voices and participation of students and parents of color and position students and parents of color as co-owners of their schools, curriculum, and instruction. Furthermore, collaborative and ecological equitable education systems invoke a collaborative approach involving intersectional politics (Crenshaw, 1991) with multiple stakeholders. A collaborative approach identifies, addresses, and annihilates the complex collateral damage of white supremacy that sustains education disparities for Black students. Where does the fight for this equitable education begin?

Boggs and Kurashige (2012) provided several critical questions to help guide researchers and educators. First, "how do we redefine education so that half of the students do not drop out of school or end up locked up" (p. 30)? Second, "how do we create a significant paradigm shift that moves us beyond the current unresponsive, unproductive and antiquated education reform that perpetuates present-day education discrimination" (p.136)? Finally, "how do we transform our schools to provide children with sustained opportunities to utilize their resourcefulness to identify and solve the problems within their communities and global issues" (p.137)? These questions are

addressed via a multidimensional and nonlinear, culturally relevant ecological education framework, figure 6.1. This ecological framework coupled with collaborative intersectional politics enhance and support parent and community engagement and development, resource fortification, healthy psychophysiological interventions, and multiple economic investments. Such economic investments involve quality and equitable public education, business opportunities to diversify rural economies, accessibility to quality and affordable public health care, and local infrastructure to support long-term community and regional development.

*Figure 6.1:* Ecological Education Framework




If education reformers desire to bring about effectual and equitable education reform, then they must move away from a neoliberal approach to privatizing education to

a collaborative approach involving intersectional politics (Crenshaw, 1997) with multiple stakeholders to identify and address the complex issues producing education disparities.

## Future Research

Future research exploring educational inequalities should seek to uncover and address the unspoken and hidden truths about why public education for historically marginalized students has become enemy number one. The inauguration of this research starts with educators, researchers, and education stakeholders engaging in a critical evaluation of the historical aspects of racially motivated denied education for students of color, especially Black students, in rural communities. In addition, these same individuals should constructively dialogue about and analyze the struggles over providing an equitable education for historically marginalized students. With this being said, I suggest that future rural research focus on four areas, historical exploration, students' voices, building capacity, and postsecondary readiness.

To study the historical establishment of education for Black students in the rural southern United States is to explore desegregation and integration policies, and demographics of students, families, and communities. Additionally, exploring the voices of Black youth attending rural schools will center the educational experiences of Black youth and capture their perceptions of their educational experiences. Continuing, future research should investigate and seek to reveal the most effective ways to build capacity to meet the needs of historically marginalized students. Once research has explored and identified ways of building capacity, the building capacity strategies should be connected to addressing the delivery of an equitable education to historically marginalized students. The research question guiding building capacity might ask in what ways might schools,

communities, and family engagement and partnerships revitalize students' academic development and achievement. Finally, future research should explore how to prepare Black students attending small rural schools for college and career readiness.

## Conclusion

This phenomenological critical race study explored and exposed the systemic racism imposed on the lives and education aspiration of six my elders who stayed in the racist south during the ferocious era of Jim Crow. These stories centered the voices of my elders as powerful weapons to expose white supremacy and the psychophysiological trauma imposed upon my elders. Consequently, these stories were not about the positioning of white people or making white people feel good about their efforts to assist people of color. Instead, these stories were about the lives, lived experiences, and educational trials and triumphs of six of my Brown and Black hue American elders whose ancestry was born out of slavery and delivered into the vicious Jim Crow era. To assist white readers with unpacking their emotional responses to my elders' stories, I suggest white people spend time researching and studying white fragility or consult with critical white scholars, such as DiAngelo and Feagin, who can assist with understanding the false sense of entitlement and unearned grandiose white privilege.

Storytelling focuses on research and provides a comprehensive exploration of how people of color lived with oppression within historical and contemporary contexts. As we examined the origins of America's morally indefensible racist ideologies, which imposed inequalities, disparities, and discriminatory sanctions on the lives and education attainment of my elders, we found that these ideologies were grounded in political

agendas perpetuating white supremacy, derogatory racial scripts, and racist societal constructs designed to control the lives and educational attainment of my elders.

**WHITE SUPREMACY…**against **BLACKNESS**

Extralegal violence

Whitewash narratives

Systemic racism

**WHITE OPPRESSION...**against **BLACKNESS**

Forced subjugation

Illiteracy

Abject poverty

**WHITE RAGE…**against **BLACKNESS**

Invisible

Racist

Violence…against

**BLACKNESS – Black bodies, Black minds, Black achievement, Black advancement, Black ambition**

**WHITE CRIME…**against **BLACKNESS**

Murder

Rape

Whippings

Hangings

What are we going to do about this violent WHITE CRIME?

Are we serious about combatting social and racial injustices, systemic racism, and oppression?

My elders' oral histories gave life to experiences, power to expressions, and essence to historical phenomena. Furthermore, my elders' oral histories connected people to time, space, and events. The exploration of these six oral histories is a step in the right direction. Let us always seek to hear and empower the silenced voices of historically marginalized people and groups, and divulge and refute the unspoken and hidden truths of inequalities, white supremacy, and systemic racism. Remember, fighting for equality is a never-ending war against racist Eurocentric decimation of Black people's existence and history.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL


**To:** Jim Scheurich

EDUCATION

DiAnna Washington

EDUCATION

**From**

Human Subjects Office

Office of Research Compliance – Indiana University

**Date:** April 03, 2017

**RE:** NOTICE OF EXEMPTION - AMENDMENT

**Protocol Title:** An exploration of the lived experiences and educational journeys of African Americans who lived through legal segregation/Jim Crow in Brinkley, Arkansas.

**Study #:** 1611061218A001

**Funding Agency/Sponsor:** None

**Status:** Exemption Granted | Exempt

**Study Approval Date:** April 03, 2017

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The Indiana University Institutional Review Board (IRB) EXE000001 | Exempt recently reviewed the above-referenced protocol. In compliance with (as applicable) 45 CFR 46.109 (d) and the IU Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Research Involving Human Subjects, this letter serves as written notification of exempt determination.

**Under 45 CFR 46.101(b) or the SOPs, as applicable, the amendment is accepted as Exempt (2) Category 2: Surveys/Interviews/Standardized Educational Tests/Observation of Public Behavior Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior if: i) information obtained is recorded**

**in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or ii) any disclosure of the human subjects responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects financial standing, employability or reputation, with the following determinations:**

Acceptance of this amendment is based on your agreement to abide by the policies and procedures of the Indiana University Human Research Protection Program and does not replace any other approvals that may be required. Relevant policies and procedures governing Human Subjects Research can be found at: http://researchcompliance.iu.edu/hso/hs_guidance.html.

The Exempt determination is valid indefinitely. Substantive changes to approved exempt research must be requested and approved prior to their initiation. Investigators may request proposed changes by submitting an amendment through the KC IRB system. The changes are reviewed to ensure that they do not affect the exempt status of the research. Please check with the Human Subjects Office to determine if any additional review may be needed.

You should retain a copy of this letter and all associated approved study documents for your records. Please refer to the assigned study number and exact study title in future correspondence with our office. Additional information is available on our website at http://researchcompliance.iu.edu/hso/.

**If your source of funding changes, you must submit an amendment to update your study documents immediately.**

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Human Subjects Office via email at irb@iu.edu or by phone at 317-274-8289 (Indianapolis) or 812-856-4242 (Bloomington)

## APPENDIX B: I NTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information

1. What is your full name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where were you born?
4. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
5. Who were (are) your parents?
6. How long have you lived in Brinkley/Monroe County? Are you original from Brinkley? Where else have you lived?
7. Tell me about your family (husband, wife, and children).

Information about Brinkley/Monroe County

1. What was Brinkley like when you were growing up?
2. What was life like for you growing up in Brinkley?
3. In what ways do you think living in Brinkley during legal segregation/Jim Crow has affected your life?

Racial Identity Information

1. How do you racially identify?
2. Tell me about what shaped/influenced your racial identity.
3. When did you first become aware of your racial identity? Tell me about that.
4. Tell me about a time when your racial identity influenced how people interacted with you.

5. How has your racial identity affected your daily life here in Brinkley?

Educational Information

1. Describe (tell me about) the education system of Brinkley when you were attending school. Did you attend an all-black school? How would you describe your education experience?
2. In what ways were your parents involved in your education?
3. Did you graduate from high school? What factors helped or hindered you from completing high school?
4. In what ways did your racial identity influence your education?
5. What is your view of education?
6. In what ways were you as a parent involved in your children's schooling /education?
7. In what ways do you think your level of education affected your children's education?

Lifespan quality questions

1. As you reflect back on your life and educational experience in Brinkley, what do you see as some of the major differences, changes, in your community?
2. If you could change things about your own education or life experiences what would you change?
3. Is there anything else you wish to share with me about your life and or educational experiences?

## APPENDIX C: INVITATION SCRIPT TO ELDERS

It is important to establish a connection with the elders by stating my family name and letting participants know that I am from the community.

Hello Mr. /Mrs. (name), this is DiAnna Washington, the daughter of (parents' name). I was reared in Brinkley and I have returned for an extended stay. I am completing my PhD at IUPUI in the Urban Education Studies Program. As part of my program, I am interested in knowing more about your lived experiences as people of color in Brinkley. Therefore, I am conducting a study to explore the experiences of elderly African Americans living in Brinkley, more specifically their education experiences and life as a person of color living in the era of legal segregation in the rural south. I am contacting you to ask if you would be willing to participant in this research study. If you agree, you agree to be interviewed two or three times during a twelve-month period. Each interview may last up to 60 to 90 minutes. Your interviews will be audio recorded and possibly video recorded.

All records in this study will be kept confidential. Nothing in our study will include your name or any additional information that might possibly identify you. Your name and other identifying information will not be kept with any documents written, electronic, or any other form. Research data will be encrypted and stored in password protected electronic files within a locked file case. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' identities and the location of the study.

There are minimal risks involved in this research. Your contribution to this study will help inform future research about the lives of people of color living in rural communities.

If at any time you wish to withdraw your participation and or information, you may do so by informing researcher of your desire to stop. Your withdrawal from the study will be immediate and all documentation of your participation will be destroyed.

Are you willing to participate?

**DiAnna Washington**
Ph.D. Candidate

**Chair: James Scheurich, Ph.D.**
Professor, Urban Education Studies

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Wimberley, R. C., & Morris, L. V. (2002). The regionalization of poverty: Assistance for the Black Belt South? *Southern Rural Sociology 18*(1), 294-306.

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# CURRICULUM VITAE

## DiAnna Washington

## Education

2019 Doctor of Philosophy
Indiana University – Indianapolis
Urban Education Studies Ph.D., Program, emphasis in Rural Education.
Dissertation Title*: Voices Of My Elders: Forgotten Place, Invisible People - A Phenomenological Exploration Of the Experiences Of African Americans Living in the Rural Southern Black Belt During the Jim Crow Era*
*Committee: James Scheurich (Chair)*

2015 Master of Science in Education, Indiana University – Bloomington
Learning Sciences Educational Psychology

2002 Master of Arts in Community Counseling, Indiana Wesleyan University

1999 Master of Business Administration, Indiana Wesleyan University

1993 Bachelor of Arts, Harding University
Psychology

## Awards and Fellowships

2018-2019 President's Diversity Dissertation Fellowship Year
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis School of Education

2015-2016 Service Learning Scholar - Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

2004-2005 Exemplary Service
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

2003-2004 Above and Beyond Service
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

**Professional Experience**

2018-2019 Parallel Education – Substitute Teacher

2018-2018 Ivy Tech Community College - Career Development Associate

2012-2015 Indiana Commission for Higher Education – Outreach Coordinator

2008-2010 Director of Student Academic Support and Coordinator of Student Disability Services – DePauw University

2003-2008 Indiana University Purdue University
Interim Assistant Director – Upward Bound
Site Director – Twenty-first Century Scholars Program
Student Mentor Program Coordinator – Upward Bound
Academic Advisor – University College

1999-2003 Indiana Wesleyan University
Director of Faculty Recruitment
Faculty Recruiter

1997-1999 Indiana Business College
Director of Continuing Education
Admission Recruiter

**Graduate Assistantships**

Fall 2017 Family, School, and Neighborhood Engagement –.Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
Khaula Murtadha, Ph.D.

2015-2016 Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools –Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
Tambra Jackson, Ph.D.

2010-2012 Diversity Equity Multicultural Affairs- Indiana University Bloomington
Philip A. Seabrook, Assistant Vice President for College Readiness & Retention Initiatives

2010-2011 Learning Sciences Program – Indiana University Bloomington
Kylie Peppler, Ph.D. and Joshua Danish, Ph.D.

**Publication**

2001 Danish, J. A., et al. "Life in the hive: Supporting inquiry into complexity within the zone of proximal development." *Journal of Science Education and Technology* 20.5 (2011): 454-467

**Presentations**

2008 Washington, D. (2018). Smiling through the resume and getting the interview. Ivy Tech Community College. Indianapolis, IN

2013 Washington, D. (2013). Twenty-first Century Scholars Program Scholar Success Program. Upward Bound TRIO. Indianapolis, IN

2012-2015 Washington, D. (2012-2015). Enrollment, Affirmation, and Senior Exit. Twenty-first Century Scholars Program. Indianapolis, IN

2007 Washington, D. (2007). Parent Engagement. Twenty-first Century Scholar Orientation. Indianapolis, IN

2005-2008 Washington, D. (2005-2008). Enrollment, Affirmation, and Senior Exit. Twenty-first Century Scholars Program. Indianapolis, IN

2005 Washington, D. (2005). Moving from College Access to College Success. I-MAEOPP Annual Spring Conference. Lake Geneva, WI

2004 Washington, D. (2004). Building Bridges: Advisors as Architects for the Future. NACADA National Conference: Cincinnati, OH